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THE MAKING OF WITCHFINDER GENERAL

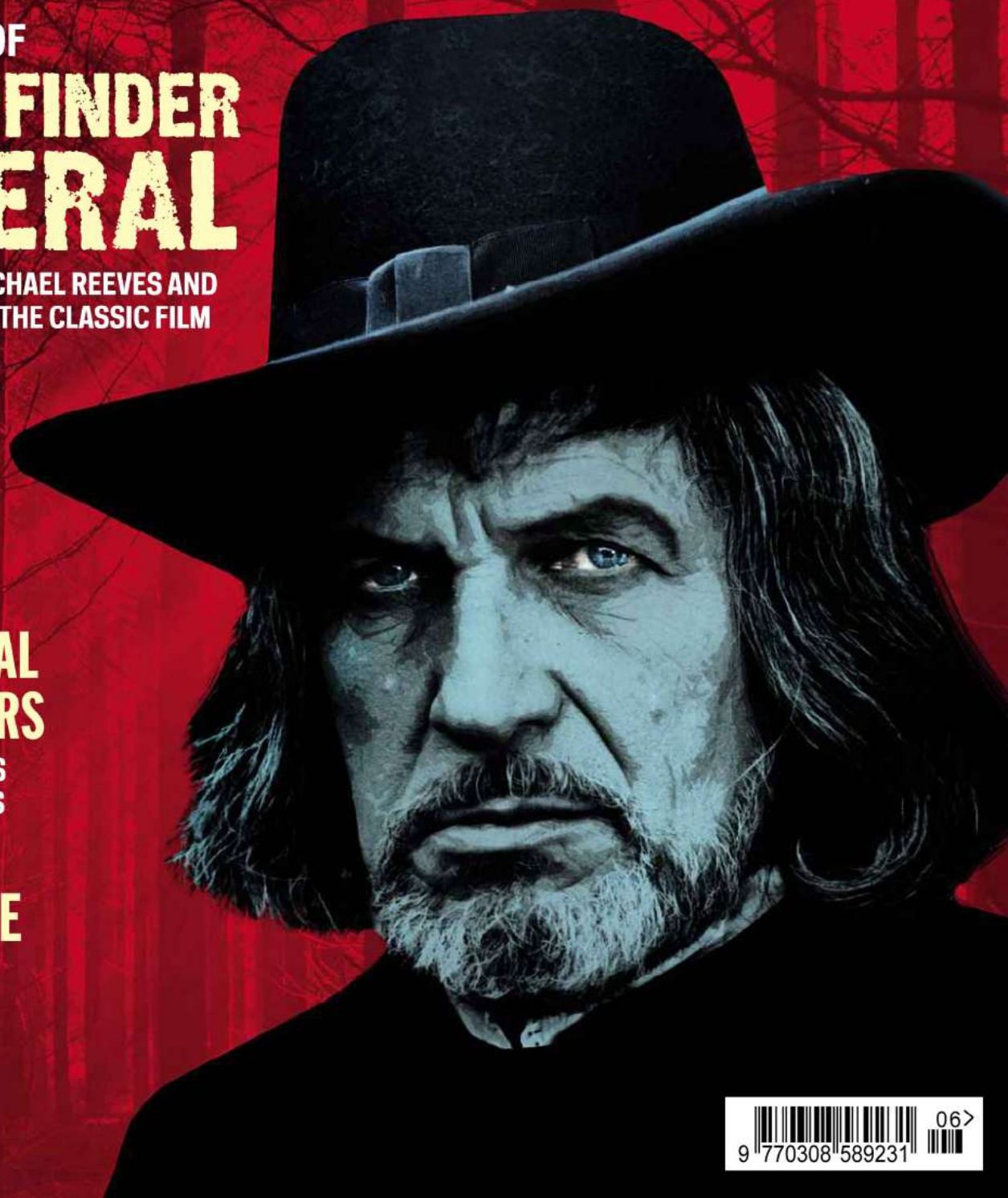
VINCENT PRICE, MICHAEL REEVES AND
THE STORY BEHIND THE CLASSIC FILM

PARANORMAL PEA-SOUPERS

MYSTERIOUS MISTS
AND GHOSTLY FOGS

BEYOND THE INFINITE

WHY KUBRICK'S
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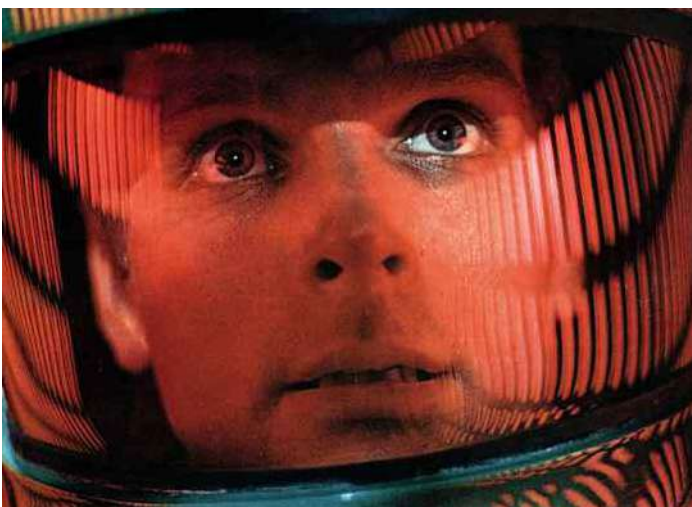


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COVER DESIGN: ETIENNE GILFILLAN. VINCENT PRICE: PHOTO 12 / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. FOREST SCENE: ALEXANDER KIRCH / EYEEM / GETTY IMAGES.



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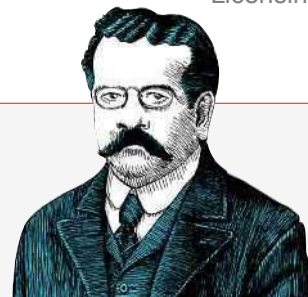
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EDITORIAL



WITCH-HUNTS AND X-FILES

WITCHFINDERS AND SCEPTICS

Welcome to an issue with a distinctly 17th-century feel. Bob Rickard concludes his examination of early cases of levitation and supernatural transportation from England and Ireland (p46) with some examples that include phenomena that sound remarkably like those we associate with cases of demonic possession, as seen in films like *The Exorcist*. Of course, in the context of the time, many of these apparant outbreaks of supernatural activity were accompanied by accusations of witchcraft, part of the mania that was sweeping across Europe at the time. As Matt Salusbury points out in his article (p40), not all of the Establishment were convinced that the mass accusations of witchcraft were credible, and a number of 'witchcraft sceptics' were brave enough to stick their heads above the parapet

and argue for a more rational approach. Meanwhile, Matthew Hopkins, just the kind of supposed "expert witness" denounced by the sceptics, was riding out across East Anglia in search of women to burn. Historian Malcolm Gaskill returns to the pages of *Fortean Times* (p32) to trace the legacy of the self-proclaimed Witchfinder General's career on stage and screen – most notably in Michael Reeves's 1968 film, starring Vincent Price, which shocked critics with its depiction of the brutality unleashed by the witch mania.

BEYOND TOP SECRET

We'd also hoped, in this issue, to bring you an exclusive report by David Clarke on the final batch of 'UFO files' released to the public. Longtime readers of this magazine will know that since 2008 David had acted as the consultant on a project that saw over 200 previously classified UFO files released to Britain's National Archives at Kew, many of which provided fascinating insights into the tangled history of the government's relationship with the UFO phenomenon through the decades. This last tranche of files originated not with the MoD's notorious 'UFO desk' but with the

UK's defence intelligence branch, DI55. The files were supposed to be released not long after most of the project was completed back in 2013; David was given a written commitment by the MoD that these documents would soon follow the others into the public domain, where they could be scrutinised by researchers. But, as David writes, another five years passed, and "after a series of baffling

administrative hold-ups, unexplained 'issues' and lame excuses I began to suspect they must contain some smoking gun that MoD were desperate to conceal."

Since then, 2,500 pages of redacted secret files have been earmarked for transfer to the National Archive, and David has been reading between the censor's blacked-out lines to see what they reveal. Is there a 'smoking gun' that reveals a cover-up at the heart of the British defence and intelligence establishment? Well, there

are certainly some unexpected insights into major disagreements between different agencies about any 'threat' posed by UFOs. More crucially, there are indications that the very specific beliefs held by the still unnamed author of the 'Condign Report' influenced his conclusions, and that the report was far from being an impartial study: its purpose, it would seem, was to discredit the "UFO thesis" and replace it with something that would allow the MoD to shut down its UFO desk in 2009.

Certain elements of what David has uncovered remain sensitive, to the point that national newspapers provided with his findings have so far shied away from fully publishing them. Given the current situation, we will be bringing you his full report next month rather than in this issue, so we hope you will bear with us as we await further developments.



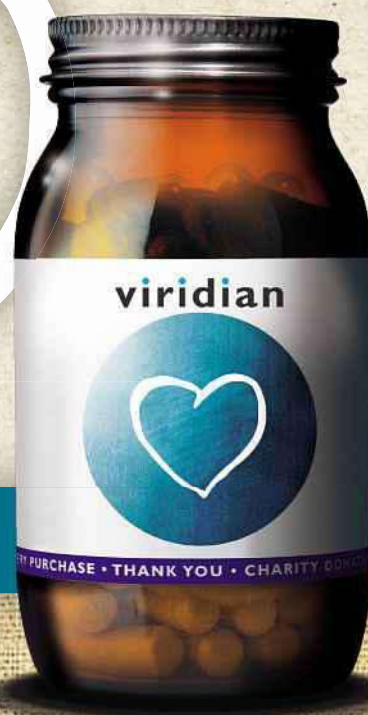
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

THE OILY MAN STRIKES AGAIN!

The *orang minyak* is on the prowl once more, striking terror into the hearts of villagers, attacking a teenage girl and, as always, evading all attempts at capture. **BOB RICKARD** reports on the Malaysian bogeyman's exploits.



ABOVE: 17-year-old victim Nik Anis Ashira Kamarulzaman and some local men reconstruct the *orang minyak* attack.

While April Fool's Day was being celebrated elsewhere, Malaysians woke to news that their national bogeyman – the *orang minyak* (Malay: Oily Man), an Islamic equivalent of Spring-heeled Jack – had been busy, assaulting a teenage girl in the village of Kubang Kerian, just outside the capital of Kelantan state, Kota Bharu. The existence of this magical pest is debated at every level of Malaysian society – believed implicitly in rural areas but scoffed at by city-dwellers and the educated who say the belief has no place in the modern world.

However, to 17-year-old Nik Anis Ashira Kamarulzaman the experience was terrifying. She had been hanging out the morning's washing at the back of her family shack in Kampung

She was tied to a chair with ropes around her upper body and legs

Pengkalan when she felt herself being pulled backwards and into their living room. The next thing she knew, she was tied to a chair with ropes around her upper body and legs. She was discovered by a neighbour who heard her cries for help.

Nik Anis Ashira described feeling “weak and unable to resist” as though she was “mesmerised” and could give no details about her attacker. Such is the pervading fear of such

attacks, or reports of them, that almost immediately there was a posse of around 100 vigilantes roaming the vicinity, looking for likely suspects. The family also said that during the past month several large stones had been thrown at the house with no assailant being found. Suddenly the story is mutation, now with poltergeist overtones and soon adding a black magic curse.

Shortly after the girl had been discovered, the *New Straits Times* posted online a longish video, from which the photo above was taken. In it, the girl, appearing subdued and withdrawn, is surrounded by a number of men discussing her experience, reconstructing the way she had been bound, and displaying a pile of missiles that had been thrown. The camera

shows no clear path through the house to the washing-line at the back, giving the impression that the girl had been either dragged through the rear window or pulled (in open view) around the house and into the front. In fact, there is very little physical evidence at the scene (some broken glass and a few oil streaks) that can support the idea of even a physical attacker; yet this is what convinces the family and neighbours that the attacker had magical powers.

The Malay newspapers know their readership and know better than to bore them with sceptical details; yet we can say, from years of reporting such incidents (see **FT287:12-15, 342:17-21**) – that this is a typical encounter with an *orang minyak*. It is generally agreed that he is not a ghost or a supernatural figure – despite featuring as such in too many modern catalogues of crypto-creatures – but a human who has made a deal with a black magician (or performed rituals himself) to gain magical abilities in return for his soul. He – we've never heard of a female *orang minyak* – is a super-thief who cannot be seen or caught, and who can lull his victims as he defies all security measures in order to (mainly) molest virgin girls. In some older versions, he is only lent these powers until he has raped a specific number of unmarried females, at which point (as in the tale of Faust) Satan comes to collect his due.

In Malay culture, *orang minyaks* appear in literature, thriller movies and even spoofed in ‘Carry-on’ type comedies. Often he is tracked



TIGER IN YOUR TANK?

Siberian tigers cause havoc on Russian roads

PAGE 12



BRING OUT THE DEAD

Plagues and other ancient illnesses

PAGE 15



MODEL MONSTER

Alty and the carcass controversy

PAGE 23



ABOVE: A splendidly oily *orang minyak* created for a Malaysian film.

down and fought by a virtuous and pious Muslim healer or senior armed (like Van Helsing) with the appropriate counter-measures, in this case Quranic verses). The characteristic feature of an *orang minyak* is that he is usually completely naked (but, for the sake of reporting, always depicted wearing underpants) and covered in black oil from head to toe. This is said to aid his criminal activities by making him hard to see at night, hiding his identity, and allowing him to elude the grasp of captors, etc. That's the popular belief, though I suspect it would not work well in reality as he will be slipping on any smooth surface, or failing to grasp the very trinkets he tries to snatch on the way, and once caught the greasy coating would be difficult to explain away.

"I felt as if I was under a spell," Nik Anis Ashira

told the *New Straits Times*. "I didn't know who this person was. I felt the person's hands clutched around my neck. My hands, feet and waist were also tied up. I couldn't breathe due to the rope knotted tightly around my waist. I could only cry and scream for help before the person fled through the kitchen window." What is curious about this case is the girl's apparent compliance, lying there – not long after this ordeal – allowing a group of men to tie her up, almost as if she were still hypnotised.

A study of mass-sociogenic panics among young people (*Mass Hysteria in Schools*, 2014, by Robert Bartholomew, to which I contributed) found that many of the panics – featuring apparitions of ghosts, corpses and even *orang minyak*s – in Malay schools were related to a rather restricted and oppressive teaching and

social regime and could on occasion trigger fainting, breathlessness and psychosomatic conditions much like those experienced by Nik Anis Ashira. Of course, rationalists will say: "You just think, or have convinced yourself, that you are being attacked." Whatever the cause, it feeds back into the collective imagination.

"Some villagers claimed to have seen this *orang minyak*, but any attempt to catch this thing has been unsuccessful," says her father, Kamarulzaman Mat Yunus. He goes on to describe what sounds like a poltergeist tantrum. "Four houses in the village have been pelted by rocks, shattering the windows in the process."

In the early hours of the following day (2 April) four mirrors in the house shattered, he said, and there was a knocking on some doors. He added that, on 3 April, a "traditional medical practitioner" found some suspicious objects under the house – the implication here being that someone was 'cursing' them. Real or imagined or contrived, for the victim there is no real difference, and that is all the more frightening as it raises questions about the nature of 'reality'.

In the end, no police report was made; no forensics were done; and the girl was not properly interviewed. Under these circumstances few would be brave – or detached – enough to question whether they were victims or had 'just' panicked themselves. *New Straits Times*, *Utusan online*, *Berita Harian online*, 1 April; *MyMetro*, 2 April; *Sinar Harian Metro*, 4 April 2018.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

ZOMBIE PRIEST IN FLUTE BAND HALLOWEEN PARTY SEX ATTACK DODGES JAIL

Daily Record, 12 Mar 2016.

Newts stop work on new city housing estate

Derby Telegraph, 29 Sept 2017.

ONLY WOMEN HAVE BAD DAYS, PUTIN SAYS

Toronto Star, 9 June 2017.

Space cake lands in Galloway

Galloway Gazette, 20 Oct 2017.

WOMAN CALLS 999 ABOUT A BROKEN EGG IN HER FRIDGE

Nottingham Post, 24 Jan 2018

GUY GETS HIS PENIS STUCK 'JUMPING OVER TUBE STATION BARRIERS'

Metro, 29 Dec 2017.

'MYSTERIOUS VOID' GETS BLAMED FOR RAIL DELAYS

Guardian, 6 Jan 2018.

SPIRIT OF LAKE ERIE

An eerie face emerges from windswept waves crashing together at Long Point on the north side of Lake Erie in Ontario. The photographer, Trevor Pottelberg, 41, named it "Spirit from the Deep". He said: "I like to think that it is the ghost of a lost captain who went down with his ship." *D.Express, D.Telegraph, 30 Mar 2018.*

PHOTO: TREVOR POTTELBERG / CATERS NEWS







STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

PEACOCK BANNED

Brooklyn-based performance artist Ventiko (real name unknown) tried to fly from Newark, New Jersey, to Los Angeles, accompanied by Dexter, her large "emotional-support peacock". She had offered to buy the bird its own plane ticket, but United Airlines refused to let it board, as it did not meet guidelines due to its weight and size. After six hours at the airport, Ventiko decided to drive across the US with Dexter and her human companions. *BBC News, 31 Jan 2018.*

MOTHER SUBSTITUTE

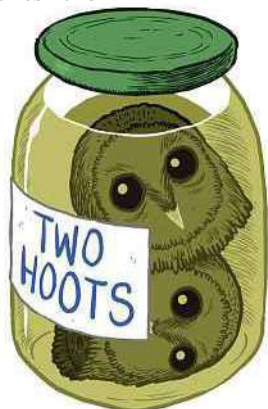
Irene Moschones, 51, of Cheltenham near Melbourne, Australia, was charged with kidnapping a woman with dementia from an aged-care facility on 6 January because she believed the woman was her dead mother, whom she had seen buried in 2013. Dimitra Pavlopoulou, 97, was found after a tip-off from a friend of Irene's. The kidnapper had refused to believe her mother was dead, asking lawyers to dig up her body for a DNA test. (*Melbourne Herald Sun, 8 Jan 2018.*)

OUT ON A LIMB

Two doctors were barred after they made a bus crash victim use his severed leg as a pillow in Uttar Pradesh, India. *D.Star, 13 Mar 2018.*

OWL HEAD TRADER

Gordon Taylor, 46, admitted illegally keeping owl heads and other bird parts in jam jars to sell online to pagans under the name of Wild Wizard Crafts. He had a buzzard's wing, a tawny owl's foot pendant and two barn owl heads in jam jars when police raided his home in Inverness in November 2015. He was fined £750. *D.Telegraph, 20 Feb 2018.*



MARTIN ROSS

ASSORTED ODDITIES

A miscellany of weirdness from around the world



ABOVE LEFT: A village of Jedek speakers in the Malay Peninsula. ABOVE RIGHT: Ken Rice's strange object: not a turkey vulture.

UNKNOWN TONGUE

A previously unknown language – dubbed Jedek – has been found in the Malay Peninsula. "Jedek is not a language spoken by an unknown tribe in the jungle, as you would perhaps imagine, but in a village previously studied by anthropologists," said Niclas Burenhult, Associate Professor of General Linguistics at Lund University, Sweden, who collected the first linguistic material from Jedek speakers. "As linguists, we had a different set of questions and found something that the anthropologists missed." The language is an Aslian variety within the Austroasiatic language family and is spoken by 280 people who are settled hunter-gatherers in northern Peninsular Malaysia.

The researchers discovered the language during a language documentation project, Tongues of the Semang, in which they visited several villages to collect language data from different groups who speak Aslian languages. The discovery of Jedek was made while they were studying the Jahai language in the same area. "We realised that a large part of the village spoke a different language," said Joanne Yager, doctoral student at Lund University. "They used words, phonemes and grammatical structures that are not used in Jahai. Some of these words

suggested a link with other Aslian languages spoken far away in other parts of the Malay Peninsula."

The community in which Jedek is spoken is more gender-equal than Western societies. There is almost no interpersonal violence, they consciously encourage their children not to compete, and there are no laws or courts. There are no professions; everyone has the skills that are required in a hunter-gatherer community. This way of life is reflected in the language. There are no indigenous words for occupations or for courts of law, and no indigenous verbs to denote ownership such as borrow, steal, buy or sell – but there is a rich vocabulary of words to describe exchanging and sharing. "There are so many ways to be human, but all too often our own modern and mainly urban societies are used as the yardstick for what is universally human. We have so much to learn, not least about ourselves, from the largely undocumented and endangered linguistic and cultural riches that are out there," said Burenhult.

An estimated 6,000 languages are currently spoken in the world. About 80 per cent of the world's population speak one of the major world languages, while approximately 20 per cent

speak one of the 3,600 smaller languages. Researchers believe that about half of the world's languages will be extinct in 100 years. You can listen to Jedek at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2q_UCFS_7a8&feature=youtu.be *sciencedaily.com, 6 Feb 2018.*

ALIEN DUMPLING

This thing (above), whatever it is, was seen over Oshawa in Ontario at about 7:45pm on 17 June 2017. "I was walking back to my car and I just saw something pop out of nowhere, way up high, far away in the sky," said wildlife photographer Ken Rice, who was taking photos in a marsh area near the General Motors of Canada headquarters. "I thought it was a big turkey vulture so I just took a picture of it anyway and then it kind of hovered, sat there for a minute and then took off." It was only later, looking at the photographs more closely, that he realised it wasn't a turkey vulture. It has been interpreted variously as a propeller-less drone, a balloon, a flying turtle, an alien dumpling – or more simply as a UFO. The most common suggestion is that the object is a helium party balloon shaped like the sun or a sunflower, but Rice vehemently disagrees. "A balloon wouldn't go that fast and disappear, and it was too high. Nobody would be flying





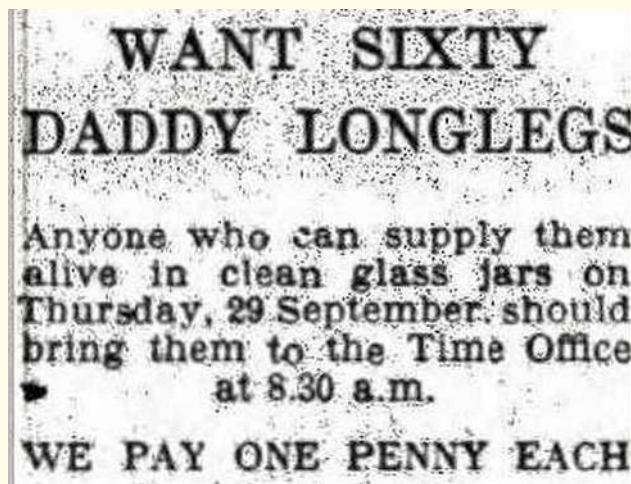
a kite there because it's just railroad tracks and the road and there was nobody around there. I didn't see anybody, and where did it go?" *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 25 June 2017.

WEEPING ONIONS

Halwyn ('Hally') Herrmann, a retired farmer from Lowood, Queensland, uses an onion and some salt to predict month-by-month rainfall; we are told he hasn't got the forecast wrong in the 60 years he has followed the tradition. His annual prediction takes place at midnight on New Year's Eve. "You peel the onion and cut it in half," he said. "Half falls to the left and the other half to the right. The left side is first and you take off six rings which are for January to June, then the other half goes from July to December. Then you put your salt in the ring and leave it until 4.30 the next morning. It makes water from the salt and you just measure by eye – you guess how much is in there and the more water there is, the more rain for that month." Hally said an ordinary brown or white onion would do but it needed to be a decent size and from a local farm. Someone from the weather bureau saw me do it one year and he was absolutely astonished an old farmer could do this," said Hally, who hopes to pass on the tradition to his six children, 12 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren. "My main hobby now is I play a lot of cards. I'm 78 and on two walking sticks."

Prenzlau dairy farmer Jack Stunke taught Hally what we might call *cæpamancy* (*cæpa* being Latin for onion) on New Year's Eve in 1958. Hally said: "Our neighbour used it at Prenzlau years ago but he was old and he had to sell up and he wanted someone to learn how to do it so he taught me. I was 17 when I learnt. I've done it every year. I don't know where he got it from but it's a German tradition and I'd say it would be over 100 years old." He said in six decades he was rarely wrong. "The readings are pretty good. I can't be exactly accurate every time and I can't predict exactly where it's going to rain, but it works for the local area," he said. *Queensland Times*, 21+24 Feb 2018.

CRANEFLY CONUNDRUM



A researcher trawling through the British Newspaper Archive website came upon the following curious advertisement in the *Lincolnshire Echo* for 23 September 1938:

WILLIAM FOSTER & CO, LTD.,
Firth Road, Lincoln – Engineers
WANT SIXTY DADDY LONGLEGS
Anyone who can supply them alive in clean glass jars on
Thursday, 29 September, should bring them to the Time Office
at 8.30 a. m.
WE PAY ONE PENNY EACH
Not more than Sixty are required.
The jars can be collected next day.

What on earth were the craneflies for? An arcane ritual? Did the public step up to the plate? Maybe an ingenious reader can offer an explanation. *Lincolnshire Echo*, 15 Feb 2018.



ABOVE: Halwyn Herrmann has been using onions to predict the weather for 60 years.

SIDELINES...

MELTDOWN UNDER

On 21 February, freemason Glenn Langford, 51, broke into Brisbane's Masonic Memorial Centre and flooded the premises by turning on taps, which set off a fire alarm, alerting the police to his presence. They found him lying drunk and naked inside the largest pipe organ in Queensland, which he had damaged beyond repair. He had downed a bottle of Johnny Walker and was clutching a remote-controlled police car, a toy machine gun and a lot of cheeseburgers. "Things just got a little loose," he said later. *lime-lightmagazine.com.au*, 7 News (Brisbane), 22 Feb; (Queensland) *Courier Mail*, 23 Feb 2018.

PERILS OF DRINK

An unnamed man in Bostwick, Florida, was bitten on the tongue by an eastern diamondback rattlesnake when he leaned in to kiss it, and had to be airlifted to hospital. He had been drinking while handling the serpent. [AP] 18 May 2017.

PLAYING POSSUM

On 24 November 2017 a liquor store employee in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, found a female opossum next to a broken and empty bottle of bourbon. The marsupial was excessively salivating and pale, and appeared disoriented. The staff pumped her full of fluids and cared for her as she sobered up. She was released back into the wild a couple of days later. [AP] 2 Dec 2017.

KILLER CRAB

Coconut crabs climb trees for more than coconuts. A Chagos Islands crab has been recorded creeping up on a roosting red-footed booby, breaking its wings and then killing and eating it on the ground. *BBC Wildlife*, Feb 2018.

TWEETING NIGHTMARE

RSPCA officers found 359 budgerigars flying around a semi-detached house in Brighton, East Sussex. The charity was called in when the owner was taken to hospital. "The noise from their tweeting and chirping was deafening," said RSPCA inspector Liz Wheeler. It took three officers three days to catch them all with nets and send them to various aviaries. *D.Mail*, 15 Jan 2018.



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

MANIMAL MENACE

Californian Claudia Ackley, 46, is suing the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the state's Natural Resources Agency for failing to keep citizens safe from Bigfoot, accusing officials of refusing to acknowledge the creatures' existence. She claims that she and her daughters had a close encounter with Bigfoot while out hiking. *D.Mirror*, 24 Feb 2018.

QUATERNARY MARRIAGE

Identical twins Zheng Dashuang and Zheng Xiaoshuang, 26, married identical twin brides Liang Jing and Liang Qing, 23, in Daqing, Heilongjiang province, China, on 3 December. Both grooms wore red bow ties and black baseball caps, while the brides chose identical white off the shoulder lace gowns. *thaivisa.com*, 13 Dec 2017.

TERMITE TERMINATORS

A baby elephant was bitten to death by termites after falling in a hole at a wildlife refuge in Cambodia. By the time workers found out, it was beyond help. *Metro*, 12 Jan 2018.

HIPPO IN MEXICO

A hippopotamus was captured in Mexico on 22 March after a 10-day hunt. It had been wandering through the eastern state of Veracruz since January, and now resides in a nearby zoo. Its capture was resisted by the residents of Las Chopas, who had grown fond of the semi-aquatic behemoth, nicknamed Tyson. Where had it come from? Almost certainly not from drug lord Pablo Escobar's dispersed zoo in Colombia [**FT344:18-19**]. *NY Post*, 10 Mar; <i>24 Mar 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

MUNIN IN MEMORIAM

The eldest of the Tower's ravens has passed away



COLIN / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Munin (right) photographed with Jubilee in 2016. She was the eldest and longest-serving of the Tower's ravens.

Munin, the eldest and longest-serving of the ravens resident at the Tower of London, died on 23 March 2018, aged 22, "after a brief age-related illness", according to a statement released by Historic Royal Palaces. Munin, who could be identified by the green band around her ankle, was previously wild. She was named after a raven belonging to the one-eyed Norse god Odin; Hugin and Munin (meaning thought and memory) would circumnavigate the Earth and return to whisper confidences in their master's ear. She arrived at the Tower in 1995 after being caught on North Uist in the Outer Hebrides.

The Tower ravens are the most famous and scrutinised of their species in the world – so much so that the announcement of a raven's death has sometimes

been delayed, for fear of exciting rumours that the end of the monarchy is nigh. Britain's relations with these birds, the largest of the corvid family, go back to the Ancient Britons. William the Bastard's men who stormed ashore in 1066 wielded raven banners. Shakespeare mentions ravens more the 50 times, exceeding any other animal species.

According to legend, should the ravens ever leave the Tower, the kingdom will fall. Charles II established the Royal Observatory at the Tower in 1675, and according to one version of the legend, John Flamsteed, the Royal Astronomer, complained to the King that the ravens were interfering with his celestial observations. Charles then ordered their demise, only to

be warned by a soothsayer that if the ravens left the Tower, "a great disaster would befall the Kingdom". The King then decreed that at least six ravens be kept at the Tower to prevent such a calamity.

Another legend that might have a bearing on the Tower raven tradition is related in the *Mabinogion*. Upon the death of the giant King Bran the Blessed (bran is Welsh for raven), his head was cut off and buried at the "White Hill" in London (usually identified as Tower Hill). This is known in the Welsh Triads as one of the Three Happy Concealments of the Island of the Mighty. As long as Bran's head stays buried there, Britain will be safe from invasion. See "The Ravens of London" by Jeffrey Vallance [**FT206:30-36**].

Until Munin's death, Ravenmaster Chris Skaife kept seven ravens, all the aviary has room for: six to fulfil the requirement of the legend and one as back-up. Now Erin, Rocky, Grip, Harris, Jubilee and Merlina hold the fort; a replacement for Munin is said to be imminent. Traditionally, the ravens would have their wings clipped to stop them flying away, although a few still manage to escape. One named Grog, who made a dash for it in 1981, was last spotted outside an East End pub called The Rose and Punchbowl. Nowadays Skaife only trims a few fathers from their wings to keep them as wild and agile as possible and over two years of experimenting says none has escaped.

Ravens are reckoned to be the cleverest of all birds, with a staggering 2.1 billion neurons packed into their forebrain. Not only can they solve complex puzzles and establish social hierarchies, but they are also talented mimics and can replicate human speech. A Tower raven called Rhys used to get behind groups of people and bark like a dog. When they looked round for the dog, Rhys would run off, cackling to himself. Her Majesty's Keeper of the Knaresborough Castle Ravens said recently that one of her birds is being considered for an 'Asbo' by the local constabulary after learning to say "What the f*** are you looking at?" to visitors. Our Celtic and Viking ancestors believed ravens possessed the power of foresight and could predict the outcomes of battles and the end of civilisations.

One claim was that the ravens have been at the Tower since the 13th century. It's true that a menagerie was kept there by monarchs for at least 600 years until 1835, when it became the foundation of London Zoo. There were hawks,

lions, leopards, monkeys and even a polar bear – but no mention of ravens. Dr Geoffrey Parnell, the official Tower of London historian, scoured the records for 1,000 years, and could trace mention of ravens no further back than 1895. In that year, writing to the RSPCA journal *The Animal World*, one Edith Hawthorn referred to the Tower's pet cat being tormented by the ravens, Jenny and a nameless mate. It is believed the birds were introduced by a family firm of exotic animal importers called Philip Castang, whose owner wrote a letter to *Country Life* magazine in 1955, confessing he had "the order for the first Tower Ravens" hanging on his office wall. Maybe some of the ravens were a punning gift to the Tower by the third Earl of Dunraven (1812-71), an archaeologist and antiquarian

*Our ancestors
believed that
ravens had the
power of foresight*

fascinated by Celtic raven myths, who added ravens to his family coat of arms.

By the late 19th century, wild ravens had been wiped out in many counties, including London, where the last known pair built a nest on the Seven Sisters Road in the far north of the city in 1845. According to the US academic Dr Boria Sax, author of *City of Ravens*, the idea that the fate of the kingdom depended on the birds only began to stick in 1940, when they became mascots for a bombed-out London during the Blitz. At one point, only one raven (named Grip) was left at the Tower; the others had been killed by bombing or had died of shock. When the Tower reopened in 1946, there were six ravens once again.

Britain's wild raven population has exploded since the ban on unlicensed killing of wild birds in 1981. There are now more than 12,000 breeding pairs around the country. Joe Shute, author of *A Shadow Above: The Fall and Rise of the Raven* (Bloomsbury 2018), recently discovered two ravens nesting at Swanscombe Marshes, only a few miles from the Tower, down the Thames estuary.



ABOVE: One of the seven Tower ravens greets visitors in a photograph taken in 1956.

SIDELINES...

STILL LETHAL

Excavating a building site in Old Quebec, a Canadian construction team came across a 200lb (90kg) cannonball. It was still live, packed with a charge and gunpowder just as it would have been when fired by the British during the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, during the Seven Years War with France. Army bomb disposal experts arrived to make it safe. *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 July 2017.

SECOND SOLAR SYSTEM

Astronomers have discovered an eighth planet orbiting Kepler-90, a star similar to our Sun, 2,545 light-years away in the constellation of Draco, showing that stars can have "large families of planets just like our own". However, Kepler-90i, the latest planet discovered, is not a place to visit, having an average temperature of 427°C (800°F). *Guardian*, *D.Mail*, 15 Dec 2017.

PESKY BIRD

Last October, a pesky pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) broke wing mirrors on over a dozen cars in a Snellville, Georgia, neighbourhood. WSB Radio reported that residents were covering their mirrors with bags to prevent any further damage. *[AP]* 26 Oct 2017.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

Jules Parent, 69, picked up a cheque for \$1,222,069 (£682,017) at the Loto-Québec offices in Quebec City last July after winning the jackpot of the Crown of Egypt lottery online. In 2008 he had also won \$1 million (£558,084) playing Lotto 6-49. *Times Colonist* (Victoria BC), 28 July 2017.

AVIAN HACKERS

Australia's three-billion-dollar National Broadband Network (NBN) is under attack from cockatoos, and has spent £47,000 fixing cables chewed by the birds. They normally eat fruit, nuts, wood and bark – cables are an acquired taste. Australian broadband is already criticised for being slow – according to a recent report, it ranks 50th in the world for Internet speed. "I guess that's Australia for you," said an NBN manager. "If the spiders and snakes don't get you, the cockies will." *BBC News*, 3 Nov 2017.



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

AMBERGRIS FINDS

Jake Tipper, 39, a musician who found a kilo lump of ambergris on Ilfracombe beach in Devon, was told it was worth £200,000. Ambergris is a digestive secretion produced by sperm whales used as a perfume ingredient. Another lump, found a fortnight later on Morecambe beach in the north of England by Ken Wilman, was said to be worth £100,000. *Times*, 16 Jan; *Irish Independent*, 2 Feb 2018.

OTTER MISTAKE

Animal welfare experts were called out to investigate a 12in (30cm) lizard found in a woman's garden in Aberdeen – only to discover it was an ornamental otter. *Sun*, 9 Mar 2018.

MAN ON "POO WATCH"

A suspected drug dealer was at "risk of death" because he had refused to defecate for 47 days, breaking the record of 23 days in custody without a bowel movement. He refused to take laxatives or have an X-ray, but was eating and drinking. Lamarr Chambers, from Brixton, south London, is thought to have swallowed Class A drugs during a police chase in Essex on 17 January. He was finally released on 5 March so he could go to hospital. *Sun*, *D.Mirror*, < i>, 24 Feb 2018.

UPLIFTING OCCUPATION

A 17-year-old bell ringer was rescued by firemen after being hoisted 40ft (12m) into a belfry when he became entangled in his rope. He injured an ankle and shoulder in the incident, which happened during a practice session at St Helen's Church in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. *Mail on Sunday*, 21 Jan 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

TIGERS OF THE TAIGA

Big cats wreak havoc and seek dental care



ABOVE: Vladivostok's striped visitor dodging traffic on busy roads. BELOW: The tiger that sought human help, safely sedated.

• An Amur (or Siberian) tiger exiled in 2016 after terrorising Vladivostok residents trekked more than 400 miles (644km) to return to the port city (pop: 600,000) in late October 2017. He first appeared in Vladivostok in October 2016, roaming the suburbs for several days and coming within a few miles of the city centre. He was dubbed "Vladik" after a nickname for the city. It was the first tiger seen in the city in 40 years. Cell phone and security camera footage showed him prowling a nearby village and highway at night and darting between cars on a busy road in broad daylight.

News of the striped predator sent Vladivostok into a de facto lockdown. Parents warned each other not to let their children outside, and police armed with assault rifles told a woman strolling in the woods to go home. Rangers staged a massive hunt with drones and infrared imaging. Once they tracked the big cat down and tranquillised him, they kept him at the Amur Tiger Centre for the winter before taking him via helicopter to Bikin national park. Scientists had followed him via a GPS collar since he was released in the park. On the long return trip, Vladik crossed the Trans-Siberian railway and killed and ate three Himalayan black bears. News of his recapture came as a hunt began for another tiger that killed a 43-year-old man gathering pinecones in the neighbouring Khabarovsk region.

As Khaideyev pushed the door open, he heard a tiger growling



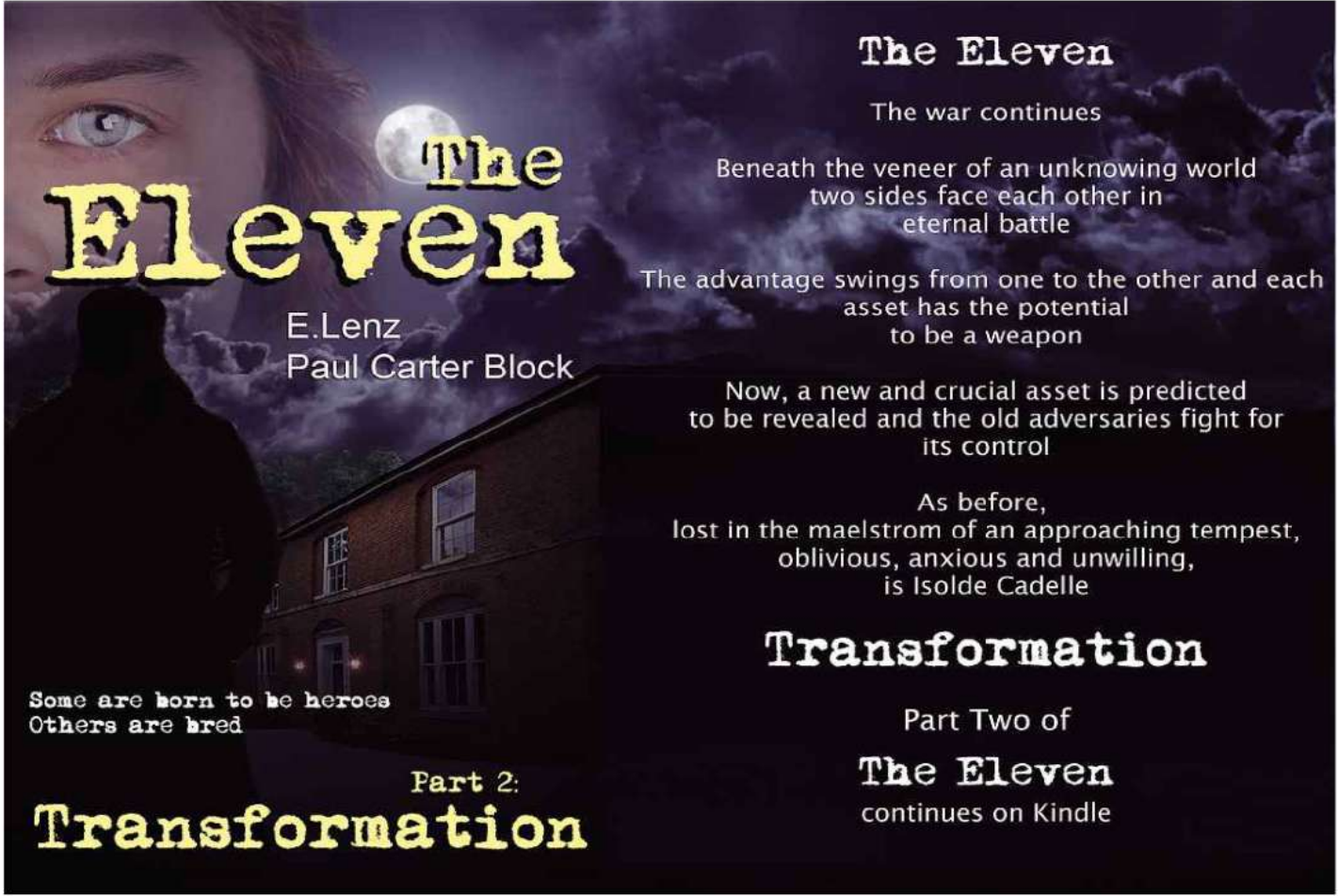
The plan was to keep Vladik in captivity or "rehabilitate" and release him.

In 2014, Vladimir Putin released three rescued tiger cubs into the wild. One of them sparked an international scare when he wandered into China, where tigers are often poached, before returning to his homeland. *D.Telegraph*, 2 Nov 2017.

• A desperate tiger tried to get human help with a severe tooth and gum problem. She sought out a house in the remote village of Solontsovy, north of Vladivostok, and lay down on the porch. These big cats usually shun human contact, but the emaciated female was clearly exhausted

and in need of urgent dental care. Galina Tsimano, who lives next door, explained how her neighbour had been surprised to find the cat on his doorstep in the early morning. She said: "Alexey Khaideyev came across a tiger on his porch. He and his wife and grandmother live on the outskirts of the village, near the river and forest. He wanted to go out to the yard in the morning, but his door was pressed by 'someone' from outside." As Khaideyev pushed the door open, he heard a tiger growling – at which point he retreated back inside and called the emergency services. Tiger experts were certain that she was seeking human help for her tooth pain and hunger.

An emergency team came to Khaideyev's house, sedated the tiger and moved her to a rehabilitation centre in Alekseevka. She was around 10 years old. "The tiger behaved absolutely peacefully, as if she was waiting for help," said Sergey Aramilev, director of the Amur Tiger Centre. Yury Kolpak, head conservationist from the Ministry of Natural Resources, added that the tiger was "thoroughly exhausted – she has serious gum problems and there are no upper teeth." She was put on a diet of ground meat laced with antibiotics, with injections administered remotely. The Amur tiger is endangered in the wild, with only 500 left in their natural habitat in eastern Russia, though they seem to be making a comeback. *Metro*, 31 Jan 2018.



The Eleven

E.Lenz
Paul Carter Block

Some are born to be heroes
Others are bred

Part 2: Transformation

The Eleven

The war continues

Beneath the veneer of an unknowing world
two sides face each other in
eternal battle

The advantage swings from one to the other and each
asset has the potential
to be a weapon

Now, a new and crucial asset is predicted
to be revealed and the old adversaries fight for
its control

As before,
lost in the maelstrom of an approaching tempest,
oblivious, anxious and unwilling,
is Isolde Cadelle

Transformation

Part Two of

The Eleven
continues on Kindle

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ARCHAEOLOGY

A MONTHLY EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

PAUL DEVEREUX, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind*, digs up the latest archaeological discoveries



ABOVE: A hillside set of the recently discovered anthropomorphic geoglyphs in Palpa, Peru.

DRONING ON

In Palpa, adjacent to Nazca, Peru, scientists using drones flying over the desert surface at a height of about 30m (100ft) have discovered 50 giant geoglyphs (ground markings), half of which were previously unknown, the rest only locally known about. While some markings are linear features like the Nazca 'lines', they are mainly anthropomorphic. Local archaeologists say these are images of warriors, but a few are seemingly depicted with radiant 'haloes' around their heads and, if so, may represent supernatural beings, or, more likely, shamans. There are also images of apes and a whale. The geoglyphs are faint, but now some have been restored to greater clarity. Unlike most of the Nazca markings, many of the Palpa geoglyphs are located on hillsides, so would have been visible to people below. Some of them were made by the Nazca culture (AD 200–700), but archaeologists believe that many were inscribed on the land by the Paracas and Topará cultures, between 500 BC and AD 200. *Peruvian Times*, 9 April; *Hyperallergic*, *Deutsche Welle*, 11 April 2018.

GIVING THE FINGER

An international team of researchers led by the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History conducting archaeological fieldwork at Al Wusta in the Nefud Desert of Saudi Arabia have discovered a fossilised human finger bone, little more than an inch long and about 88,000 years old

(determined by uranium-series dating). The discovery is the oldest directly dated *Homo sapiens* fossil outside of Africa and the neighbouring Levant region. This slightly awkward finding obliges scholars to accept there were migrations of modern humans out of Africa and into Eurasia that were more than 20,000 years earlier and more expansive than previously thought. *Science Daily*, 9 April; *Guardian*, 10 April 2018.

The idea of several dispersals is supported by recent discoveries such a trove of teeth from a Chinese cave (100,000 years old), human fossils in Sumatra from about 70,000 years ago, archaeological finds from northern Australia (65,000 years old) not to mention the fossils from Misiya in Israel (90,000 to 194,000 years old). *Science*, *Guardian*, 26 Jan; *NY Times*, 27 Jan 2018.

WHAT A PAIN

A bizarre piece of recent research relates to modern humanity's journey from Africa, whenever it was. It concerns, of all things, migraine. This has long been viewed as a hereditary disease, but recently released research, again from Germany's Max Planck Institute, indicates that factor goes much further back than had been realised. Researchers led by Felix-Michael Key found that a particular genetic mutation linked to migraines is much more prevalent among people in Europe or of European descent. By studying genetic patterns of the TRPM8 gene, via which human beings sense cold temperatures, they found that certain

mutations were far more common across various geographical latitudes. For example, only around 5 per cent of people with Nigerian ancestors have the gene variant, while 88 per cent of people with Finnish ancestors have it. This suggests that as modern humans migrated north out of Africa, they adjusted to colder temperatures, but in doing so also became more prone to migraines. *Deutsche Welle*, 3 May 2018.

MESO-POT-AMIA

Readers of this columnist's *The Long Trip* will know that there was widespread use of a range of psychoactive substances right across the ancient world; but there has been resistance to the idea by some scholars regarding the ancient Near East. Now, increasingly sophisticated analysis of traces of organic fats, waxes, and resins invisible to the naked eye found inside ritual and other vessels have allowed scientists to identify the presence of various substances with a whole new order of accuracy. Thus, we are now dealing with "hard scientific evidence" as one researcher, David Collard, put it. So, for instance, signs of 3,000-year-old ritual use of opium have been confirmed to scientific satisfaction in Cyprus. Certainly, by that time drugs like cannabis had arrived in Mesopotamia, while elsewhere, like Turkey and Egypt, mind-altering blue water lily was taken, after being steeped in wine. (Tutankhamun's body was bedecked with the plant, incidentally.)

Furthermore, Diana Stein, from Birkbeck University, London, reckons that archaeologists have studied scenes of rituals involving drugs and their effects without realising it. She argues that 'banquet scenes' depicted on small seals from Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran show people actually imbibing psychoactive potions.

It is perhaps not widely appreciated that cannabis, not originally native to Europe, found its way into the continent brought by the Yamnaya people (late Proto-Indo-Europeans) who came out of Central Asia circa 5,000 years ago – European Stone Age times. In 2016, a team from the German Archaeological Institute and the Free University found residues and remains of cannabis at Yamnaya sites across Eurasia. It is argued by sceptics, blinkered by the modern mainstream cultural antipathy toward mind-altering substances, that it was used only to make hemp for rope, but come off it – you can bet that they also inhaled. As noted in *The Long Trip*, among other sources, ritual braziers containing charred cannabis have been uncovered in the Caucasus – that region at the meeting of Asia and Europe. *Science*, 13 April 2018.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

225: KEEP TAKING THE TABLETS

“The unknown disease is antiquated sensationalism” – Fort, *Books*, p970

I wrote this in late 2014, when Ebola was ravaging West Africa and threatening to spread far beyond. A possible grisly link here with the devastating plague that struck Athens in 430 BC (pictured at right), described at length by Thucydides (bk2 chs47-55), himself a rare case of one who contracted the disease but lived to tell the tale. This first scientific medical report is far too long to quote (print and on-line translations abound); a snippet from the Roman poet Lucretius (*On the Nature of Things*, bk6 vv1199-1203, 1st-century BC) is more amenable:

*A wasting and a death from ulcers vile
And black discharge of the belly, or else
Through the clogged nostrils would there
ooze along
Much fouled blood, oft with an aching
head.*

Thucydides reports the pestilence came from Ethiopia via Libya and Egypt. Hence, Ebola or some cognate viral haemorrhagic disease has been added to the long list of modern explanations. These include anthrax, bubonic plague (obviously influenced by the ‘Black Death’ of mediæval Europe), Legionnaire’s Disease, smallpox, toxic shock syndrome (now dubbed ‘Thucydides’ syndrome – well, his tricky Greek was a plague to us as students), typhus, or simply a disease now extinct.

Judging by recent medical conferences and research, including DNA dental analyses of teeth from Athenian burial pits, epidemic typhus fever is the current favourite – were there any Athenian Typhoid Marys spreading infection?

The smallpox theory was adduced in the 18th century by Samuel Johnson’s friend and patron, Hester Thrale, evidently influenced by its contemporary ravaging of England and the vaccinations pioneered by Edward Jenner.

Smallpox has been traced back to prehistoric times, first identifiable in Egyptian mummies. However, PS Codellas (*Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 8, 1946, 207-15) maintains there is no evidence of this in Greece, Rome, or Byzantium, until descriptions by Aaron of Alexandria (c.610-641), Constantinus Africanus (1020-87), first to use the term Variola, and the 12th-century writer Theodore Prodromes



whose descriptions (in prose and verse) of his illness – suggestively unheard of by his doctors – constitute the earliest documented case history.

Hideously fatal diseases afflict various ancient individuals, often ones deemed evil and deserving of a bad end. Plutarch (ch36) records Roman dictator Sulla (d. 78 BC) as suffering from ulcerated bowels which corrupted all his flesh with lice that attendants working round the clock were unable to eliminate, being also overwhelmed by the stink of putrefaction.

Plutarch appends a list of earlier Greek and Roman victims. Pliny (*Natural History*, bk26 ch86 para138) diagnosed the sickness as phthiriasis or lice infestation. Modern explanations inevitably compete, including syphilis (whose origins remain vigorously disputed) or some other venereal disease; cf. L Cilliers & FP Retief, ‘The Sulla Syndrome,’ *Acta Classica* 43, 2000, 33-43. To stay on the ball, I subjoin that Sulla (like the monorchid Hitler of military song) only had one testicle.

The same malady afflicted Herod the Great (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, k17 ch6 para5), earning the sobriquet ‘King’s Evil’. Apart from the usual infestations of lice and putrefying odours from body and mouth, one unwelcome novelty was the emergence of worms from his rotting cock – penile servitude indeed.

Most gruesome is Lactantius’s description (showing precious little sign of Christian compassion) of what befell the persecuting emperor Galerius in 310/311 (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, ch33). As Herod, he was supposedly being punished by God for his transgressions. Beginning with ulcerated genitals, cancerous tumours grew, increasing in size after each surgical excision, his entire body suppurating

externally due to the worms eating away his viscera, all producing a stench that “pervaded not just the palace but the whole city; and this was not surprising since the channels for his urine and excrement were now confused with each other”.

As with the Plague of Athens and Sulla, there are competing medical explanations for the agonies of Herod and Galerius, the favourites being chronic kidney disease, bowel cancer, or Fournier’s Gangrene; cf. AA Kousoulis & others, ‘The Fatal Disease of Emperor Galerius,’ on-line paper from the Medical Department,

University of Athens, 2012.

As with Theodore Prodromes and smallpox, so the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX (nicknamed ‘Gladiator’ – long before Russell Crowe) is apparently the first documented case of rheumatoid arthritis; cf. DE Caughey, *Annals of Rheumatic Diseases* 33, 1974, 77-80. As described by the contemporary courtier-historian Michael Psellus (*Chronographia*, bk 6 chs128-31, beginning with his feet, every part of his body was swamped with ‘humours’, his hands and feet were twisted and bent, limbs ceased to work, the pain ubiquitous and excruciating: “Paralysis followed paralysis in rapid succession. He did not know how to find a comfortable position in bed. His servants would hold up and support his pain-wracked body until they discovered some posture that gave some small relief and arranged pillows to prop him. Even his tongue hurt when talking and the slightest movement of his eyes was agonizing, unless he lay still, never turning in either direction...”

As seen, modern medics think they have solved all these ghastly ailments. But I doubt any of them can explain – even Fort himself might have been hard-pressed – the plague that struck the people of Abdera (a Thracian/Bulgarian town synonymous with idiocy), reported by Lucian (*How to Write History*, ch1; Eunapius, *Histories*, frag. 48) in which the inhabitants, after a week of fever, haemorrhaging, and diarrhoea all in unison for days and weeks on end shouted and sang extracts from Euripides’s *Andromeda* – Beatlemania never reached those heights or depths.

“I do not attack germ-theory as absolute nonsense, because I conceive of no theory that is more than partly nonsensical” – Fort, *Books*, p934.



Ghostly Mists and Fogs: Part One

ALAN MURDIE peers through a media pea-souper to catch sight of celebrities facing spooky peril

Producers of the popular ITV show *Dancing On Ice* have blundered by choosing for recording studios premises forming part of the long-closed Bovingdon aerodrome in Hertfordshire. Locals aver the area is haunted by “a mysterious mist” that “follows and engulfs people”. According to claims widely published in January 2018, the studios are now “experiencing paranormal activity” and being “haunted by a creepy presence”. A ‘source’ for the *Daily Star* told the paper: “It’s likely many of the contestants and professional skaters have no idea they are performing somewhere that’s rumoured to be haunted”.

If they had no idea before, they certainly do now. The announcement that a menacing phantom mist might be descending upon *Dancing On Ice* featured in the *Sun*, *Daily Express*, *Metro* and *OK* magazine for 21 January 2018 and also appeared extensively on-line. Many writers expressed fears that the presenters Holly Willoughby and Philip Scofield, celebrity participants in the show and even audience members, were in peril of being exposed to spooky manifestations.

Seldom have ghostly mists and fogs received such lurid attention. Leading the coverage throughout, the *Daily Star* even proclaimed an impending threat to the series itself, stating: “If the claims are to be believed there’s a good chance something could happen during rehearsals or even while the show is on air”. The paper openly speculated that producers would be forced into finding a new location. Fans of the series and sensitive readers were left with an unsettling mental image of a malevolent



phantom fog swirling around the brightly lit *Dancing On Ice* studios, ready to strike. One voluble informant stated: “They say it suddenly appears and is so thick you can’t see through it”.

Exactly who ‘they’ may be remains equally unclear, these anxious claims apparently being inspired by a brief entry on the Waymaker navigation website. This, in turn, was derived from a short reference to a ghostly mist at Bovingdon carried by the *Watford Observer* for 30 October 2015, duly expanded with quotes from the unnamed source cited by the *Daily Star*.

When scrutinised it appears “one person” is rumoured to have seen the mist late at night on the runway, though a multi-witness sighting on an unspecified date was also alleged by this same informant who continued, “Some friends of his [i.e. the single unidentified runway witness] were waiting in a car six metres away and they said it followed him. It was engulfing him... The victim found that he could not see through the mist to the car nor could he hear his companions calling out to him.”

Strange reactions on the part of dogs being exercised by owners and dog-walkers around the former airfield have also been reported. Pets howl without reason and try to run away, with their symptoms blamed upon the ghostly presence. Not surprisingly, just a week after these stories circulated, Holly Willoughby was reportedly so terrified of ghosts that she did not want to return to Bovingdon at all. (*Sun*, 29 Jan 2018).

It is easy to scoff at such reports, unsupported as they are by any identifiable first-hand testimony. As tongue-in-cheek and gloating tabloid journalists would fully appreciate, the notion of an animated cloud of ghostly fog or mist threatening a visitation upon a TV broadcast teeters along the tremulous tightrope between the downright horrific and black comedy. One can easily envisage a macabre drama in the cynical style of the BBC’s notorious *Ghostwatch* broadcast of 1992, featuring smiling presenters, eager and bewitching dancers and innocent housewives, mums and children flocking to the studio to enjoy this family show. Add a complacent expert or two – re-assuring everyone all is well – and producers recklessly proceeding with a broadcast, despite fervent warnings that a baleful mist is on its way... clearly all the elements are in place for a mini-drama waiting not to be made. In rational terms, it all seems so much nonsense.

Easy to laugh too, because ghostly mists and fogs are very much the poor relation of the apparitional community, a neglected minority left hovering around and receiving scant attention from psychic researchers compared with other more embodied phantoms.

Such indifference by researchers is easy to understand. As a rule, researchers prefer better defined and more personified ghosts, ones whose origins may be potentially traceable to once-living people. It is rather hard to relate meaningfully or find traces of anything as insubstantial as an anonymous cloud. When it comes to ghost stories, audiences generally prefer apparitions to be identifiable humans or creatures with which they can connect emotionally. Ghostly fogs and mists lack identity and a sense of kin, serving better as the backdrop for a ghost story rather than as the actual ghost itself.

Consider for a moment the long associations between fogs and the supernatural in English fiction. Foggy weather goes very well with tales of ghosts and hauntings set in wintertime, supplying



TOP: Holly Willoughby and Philip Scofield, presenters of *Dancing on Ice*. ABOVE: Bovingdon aerodrome.

both a ready symbol and framing device, from Charles Dickens through to Susan Hill, and equally for many non-supernatural mystery stories and thrillers. Dramatic tensions increase when people become hopelessly lost in winter fogs. Characters may stumble directionless and flounder for hours, with anxiety rising all the time as a result of reduced sensory input. All manner of horrors can be imagined lurking unseen, a device fully exploited in story-telling, from Conan Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles* to the mythologised accounts of the crimes of Jack the Ripper (notwithstanding the fact that 'Jack' was on the loose in the warm summer and early autumn of 1888).

Fog was used as a symbol for the gloomy moods of the characters and location in Edgar Allan Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*, long before modern psychology adopting it as clinical simile, e.g. "Moods are like fog. They can roll in unexpectedly and obscure the brightness of life, making everything grey and dark and difficult." (Alex Korb in "The Mysterious Fog – Observations on the Depressed Brain" in *Psychology Today* 26 Jun 2012). Phrases like "shrouded in fog" carry with them ominous hints at being wrapped in a winding-sheet for burial.

With a few cinematic and literary exceptions (e.g. the horrors and sci-fi shockers of John Carpenter and James Herbert), fogs are primarily considered in terms of providing mood and backdrop. To more relaxed and poetic minds, certain fogs can be perceived as peaceful, beautiful or mysterious, supplying a sense of romance to rural landscapes; for example the magical feel of Celtic hills and mountains enhanced by light coverings of mist. Altogether, fogs serve as both a literal and metaphorical concentration of the atmosphere in a story, rather than operating as distinct, independent entities in their own right.

Metaphor and dramatic framing aside, the obvious reason investigators dismiss phantom fogs is that they may be indistinguishable from the real thing, or just simply be one and the same.

Fogs and mists generate pseudo-apparitions or visual effects mistaken as ghosts. As I boy I was intrigued with a photograph labelled "The Spectre of the Brocken, photographed for the first time" in a book that belonged to my maternal grandfather, *The Story of the World in Pictures* (1934). This showed a shadowy form like a giant stick man over a misty mountainscape, with an accompanying illustration of a remarkable pyramid mirage in Ceylon (as it was then called), which arises around Adam's Peak. Such Brocken Spectres may explain sightings of menacing forms at Ben MacDhui in Scotland (*The Big Grey Man of Ben MacDhui*



ABOVE: "The Spectre of the Brocken", from *The Story of the World in Pictures* (1934).

In low-lying areas it is not surprising that mist is often mistaken for a phantom figure in white

(1974) by Affleck Grey and 'The Big Grey Man of Ben MacDhui and Other Mountain Panics' by Andy Roberts in *Fortean Studies*, 1998, vol.5).

Regarding other photographs purportedly showing ghostly mists and fogs, many have normal explanations, cloudy patterns being no more than condensation or ordinary mist drifting in front of the lens; for example, with an oft-published photograph of the Skirrid Mountain Inn in Wales (which promotes itself as a pub conveniently haunted on a monthly basis for visiting groups). In low-lying areas it is not surprising that mist is often mistaken for the phantom of a "figure in white", especially in woods. The natural phenomenon of mist in small clouds may not be appreciated at the time of seeing what appears to be a ghostly apparition drifting along a few inches above the ground.

Researcher Andrew Green stated in *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide* (1973, 2016): "Even old style petrol pumps seen on a misty evening may be mistaken for human figures. A letter box on the side of the road a few yards from my house has often been mistaken by motorists, when speeding round the corner at night, for the figure of a man." That sceptical favourite 'pareidolia' comes into play, with the random arrangement of mist into shapes suggestive of faces or bodies.

In this regard, I observe many sceptics seem delighted whenever they can pronounce 'pareidolia' to explain away an anomaly, but frankly most critical psychic investigators look for cases presenting more of a challenge ('wishful thinking' is often a broader, resonating and more all-encompassing phrase for such visual misinterpretations). Knowing that a ghostly figure appeared out-of-doors in mist is enough for most serious investigators to file an account away without more consideration, even with a remarkable report, such as the following recorded by the compilers of an 1885 study of apparitional experiences conducted by the Society for Psychical Research.

One foggy November night, two sisters and their maid were on an English country road. The Moon was full, "but it made a sort of steam in the fog, instead of shining brightly". Suddenly the three women found themselves surrounded by multiple figures: "It was as if we were in a crowded street; innumerable figures were round us; men, women, children, and dogs, all were moving briskly about, some singly, others in groups, all without a sound; they appeared mist-like. There was a broad strip of grass on our right, and a narrow strip on our left; the figures were hidden directly they got on either of these dark strips, or when they passed into ourselves; but as we walked on they came from every quarter. Some seemed to rise out of the grass on either side of us; others seemed to pass through us, and come out on the other side. The figures all seemed short, dwarf-like, except one."

Editors of the collection considered it was perhaps possible that the small figures were "irregularities in the density of the fog interpreted into shapes of men and



GHOSTWATCH

women... If the phenomenon was really a 'psychical' one it is peculiarly unlucky that the one fact of this kind, recorded in a collection of 370 narratives, should have occurred in a fog". The case suggested "a borderland between illusion and hallucination", occurring on a country road ('Phantasms of the Dead' *Proceedings of the SPR*, vol.3, 1885).

Indoor mists can initially be more problematic, though a number of photographic images may result from various kinds of discharges from domestic fixtures and appliances. The late Maurice Grosse suggested to me that some photographs showing mists might represent paranormal activity inside domestic dwellings; a key factor was whether there was any other manifestation reported (preferably physical) on the premises before considering whether anything paranormal might be involved.

Perplexing questions remain unanswered with many such pictures. Just what is actually being recorded by the camera? Presuming anything paranormal, is it a phantom, a foggy image created by a phantom, or a case of anomalous equipment failure spoiling the picture? (Equipment malfunction is postulated as an effect in itself at haunted locations.) Even if one is open to paranormal explanations, could images be unconsciously produced by the photographer (or anyone else present) by way of psychokinesis, as was proposed with the famous Ted Serios 'thoughtography' images claimed as "polaroids of thoughts" by the American psychiatrist Jules Eisenbud during the 1960s.

Then there are strange mists and fogs observed in the séance room. At a sitting with the Polish medium Franek Kluski held on 3 December 1922, at 9pm in Professor Richet's drawing room in Paris, Professors Richet and Leclairinche were convinced they witnessed "a misty mass in the shape of a disc" and "a light the size of a glow-worm" passing around the circle and above the head of the groaning and shivering medium. On other occasions, observers sitting with Kluski recorded "a slightly phosphorescent foggy vapour" followed by lights "like fireflies", but sometimes a larger and more persistent cloud, along with other materialisations. Strange mist-like effects were also seen in the presence of the Austrian Schneider brothers, two extensively tested teenage mediums in the 1920s and 1930s (*Other Realities? The Enigma of Franek Kluski*, 2015, by Zofia Weaver; *The Strange case of Rudi Schneider*, 1985, by Anita Gregory).

Talk of flowing séance-room vapours



ABOVE: A scene from Hitchcock's *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, which made use of the fanciful association of Jack the Ripper's murderous activities with menacing ghostly mists.

oozes into the vexed subject of ectoplasm, a semi-solid product that could assume forms of the dead (or so many believers claimed in Spiritualism's late, corporeal venture of the 1890s). It's a mistake to assume all researchers treated ectoplasm as the stuff of discarnate spirits. Forms often resembled faces or partially formed limbs or trunks, swathed in vapours. In fact, many investigators were convinced materialists who viewed the emanations as living matter originating solely from the body of the medium with no discarnate involvement (presuming any such manifestations to be genuine and not brazen deceit and chicanery). Arguments have raged for generations about the reality or otherwise of such grotesque effects. For the more visually sophisticated audience of today, the photographic evidence ranges from the inconclusive to the downright laughable. Perhaps the most damning evidence is negative, in the near-disappearance of ectoplasm since the arrival of infra-red photography in séance rooms.

Yet as a spontaneous phenomenon – by my estimates – ghostly mists and fogs actually feature in 4% of reported hauntings. Take, for example, the mist seen by staff and guests in a room at the Old Crown Pub, Deritend. At around 7am on 21 August 1999, a couple staying in Room 8 reported a metallic clang and a white mist appearing as company. Both heard a metallic rumble "like chains being dragged through the loft or attic above". One then heard a "weird high-pitched noise with an undertone of a female voice" and experienced a feeling "as if I was being sucked towards the window, then it ebbed, and then the light returned."

Or consider the experience in 2003 of Gabrielle Cooper, former duty manager

at the George Hotel, West Crawley. She recalled hearing 'whooshing noises' and whilst waking up in bed at 4.55am one morning she underwent the sensation of someone holding her down in bed. This experience lasted five minutes. It was repeated on a second occasion when she saw a grey mist from which two misty shapes emerged, interpreted as angelic entities. (*Take a Break, Fate and Fortune*, April 2007).

Or what of the report from CEParanormal, a group from the Midlands, who said they witnessed a blue mist during a vigil at Sally Lunn's tearoom in North Parade Passage, Bath? A manager had called them in following a customer seeing an apparition at a table. (*Bath Chronicle*, 18+25 April 2007).

Two of these experiences might be dismissed as hypnopompic (half-awake) dreams or instances of sleep paralysis. But these do not account for witnesses who are wide-awake, indoors or out, who proffer detailed accounts of such encounters. Coupled with Jenny Randles's suggestions that certain cloud-like atmospheric phenomena may be plasma vortices linkable with UFO encounters, stories of ghostly mists actually merit greater attention.

In particular – and especially with reference to the excited reports concerning the *Dancing On Ice* studios at Bovingdon – there do exist a small number of particularly creepy accounts of ghostly fogs. These behave like independent entities and often make an unpleasant impact on those witnessing them. Accordingly, in the tradition of forteen collectanea, in my next column I shall draw together some reports of these foggy, autonomous ghosts. If true, they make for disturbing reading.



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THE ADELAIDES

★ *Rising* ★
STAGE

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ICARUS FALLS • THOSE DAMN CROWS

THE CULT

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**BLACKBERRY
SMOKE**

SONS OF APOLLO

**TYLER BRYANT &
THE SHAKEDOWN**

THE LAST INTERNATIONALE

BLUES

GOV'T MULE

CHAS & DAVE

JIM JONES
AND THE
RIGHTEOUS MIND

LAURENCE JONES • KRIS BARRAS BAND
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STRANGE DAYS

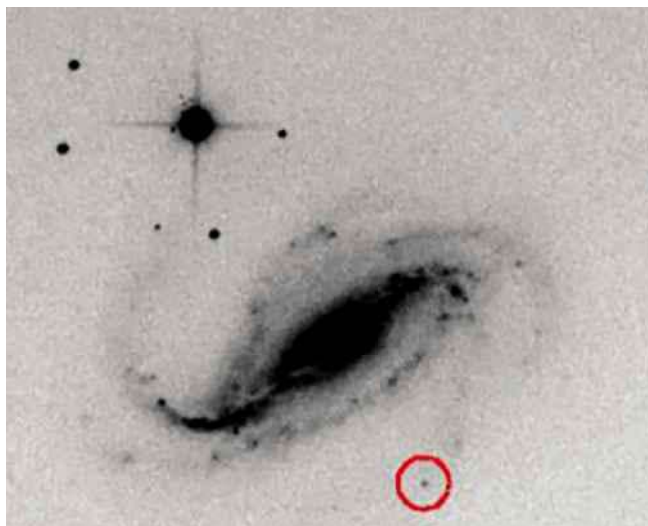
ASTRO NEWS

Amateur astronomer beats world's most powerful telescopes to snap birth of a supernova, while alien life suffers a setback due to phosphorus shortage

One September night in 2016, an amateur astronomer called Victor Buso was trying out his new camera when a star exploded. Over the next half hour he took a series of images that captured the violent birth of a supernova, something that had eluded the most powerful telescopes on the planet for decades. Buso who lives in Rosario, central Argentina, pointed his telescope at a distant spiral galaxy called NGC613 because it happened to be overhead. For the first hour or so, nothing happened. Then a bright light appeared, doubling in strength over the space of 25 minutes. It was the first clear image of a supernova's "shock breakout" phase. A team of professional astronomers swiftly took up the case and watched the explosion as it cooled. Buso's observations have now been published in *Nature*. *Times*, 22 Feb 2018.

- Astronomers in Western Australia have found that every galaxy so far observed, no matter how big or small, rotates once every billion years. This sounds like a sort of "galactic year" (but they don't call it that). Evidence was also found of older stars existing on the edge of galaxies, where only newly formed stars and gas were previously expected to appear. All very puzzling. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 15 Mar 2018.

- NGC1052-DF2, a distant galaxy that appears completely devoid of dark matter, has deepened the mystery of the Universe's most elusive substance. The absence of dark matter from a small patch of sky might appear to be a non-problem, given that it has never been observed directly anywhere; but most current theories of the Universe suggest that everywhere ordinary matter is found, dark matter ought to be lurking there too, making the newly observed galaxy an odd exception. It challenges the standard ideas of how galaxies form. Dark matter's existence is inferred from its



ABOVE: The birth of a supernova captured by amateur astronomer Victor Buso.

gravitational influence on visible objects, which suggest there is more than five times more of it than there is ordinary matter. Some of the clearest evidence comes from tracking stars in the outer regions of galaxies, which consistently appear to be orbiting faster than their escape velocity, suggesting there is unseen but substantial mass holding stars in orbit. *Guardian*, 29 Mar 2018.

- Radio bursts have been recorded flashing from space. These are brief, powerful pulses of radio waves that last just a few milliseconds. Only 33 have ever been detected, and this includes three within 11 days – on 1, 9, and 11 March 2018. "The burst on March 9 was by far the brightest we have ever seen," said Dr Maura McLaughlin at West Virginia University. It is thought that all the bursts repeat, but some are too dim to be visible. Their origin is unknown. *Metro*, 22 Mar 2018.

- A star nine billion light years away, discovered in Hubble Space Telescope images taken between April 2016 and 2017, is the most distant single star ever seen, at least 100 times further away than the next visible star. Usually at such distances, astronomers can only observe galaxies, supernovas and gamma

ray bursts. Beyond 100 million light years, it is impossible to make out individual stars; but in this case a rare cosmic alignment naturally magnified the B-type blue supergiant star more than 2,000 times, allowing us to see it. It is hundreds or even thousands of times brighter than our own Sun and was visible because of "gravitational lensing", which occurs when massive galaxy clusters bend the light of objects behind them. A report on the discovery of the star – dubbed "Icarus" – appears in the journal *Nature Astronomy*. *D.Telegraph*, 3 April 2018.

- China hopes to create a "mini-biosphere" on the dark side of the Moon, with flowers and silkworms sustaining each other as they grow on the lunar surface. The insects, plants, potato seeds and *arabidopsis*, a small flowering plant belonging to the mustard family, will be taken to the Moon on board the Chang'e-4 lander and rover in December 2018. They will be placed in a 7in (18cm) tall bucket-like tin made from special aluminium alloy materials, together with water, a nutrient solution, and a small camera and data transmission system. A small tube will direct natural sunlight into the tin to help the plants and the potato seeds grow. Although known

figuratively as the "dark side" as it is unseen, the far side of the Moon receives almost equal sunlight to the near side. The plants will emit oxygen, which will feed the silkworms hatching from their cocoons. The silkworms will then create carbon dioxide and produce waste that will allow the plants to grow. "Our experiment might help accumulate knowledge for building a lunar base and long-term residence on the Moon," said Prof Liu Hanlong, chief director of the experiment and vice-president of Chongqing University. *D.Telegraph*, 14 April 2018.

- Alien life may be more unlikely than commonly thought, according to a British study that hints at a cosmic lack of phosphorus, which is vital to energy storage and transfer in cells, and part of the chemical backbone of DNA. Phosphorus is created in supernovae, but the research suggests that typical supernovae may not provide the conditions needed for forging the element. Earth may have been unusually lucky, because it happened to be situated close enough to the "right" kind of supernova. "The route to carrying phosphorus into newborn planets looks rather precarious," said Dr Jane Greaves, as astronomer from the University of Cardiff. "We already think that only a few phosphorus-bearing minerals that came to Earth, probably in meteorites, were reactive enough to get involved in making proto-molecules."

The evidence comes from observations of two supernova "remnants", Cassiopeia A (Cas A) 11,000 light years away, and the famous Crab Nebula, 6,500 light years away. There was much less phosphorus from the Crab Nebula than from Cas A. Dr Phil Cigan, another Cardiff astronomer, said: "The two explosions seem to differ from each other, perhaps because Cas A results from the explosion of a rare super-massive star". *D.Telegraph*, 5 April 2018.



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Voynich Manuscript not decoded, Dalí's 'daughter' not related, and Nigerian's penis not missing...

PURLOINED PENIS PANIC [FT323:24]



On 14 March 2018 Banaganas Mustapha, 28, a tricycle taxi driver in Borno State, Nigeria, stopped to ask Mickey Dauwo, a cook from Cotonou, Republic of Benin – who was walking along Saka Tinubu Street, Victoria Island – if he could exchange a 100 Naira (20p) banknote for two 50 Naira (10p) notes, so that he could give change to his passenger. Dauwo obliged, whereupon Mustapha declared that the cook had stolen his penis and attacked him for its return. Police corporal Gideon Balogun, on his way to work, intervened and appealed to Mustapha to take Dauwo to the Bar Beach Police Station instead of fighting him. Ignoring this advice, Mustapha got on his phone and summoned five kinsmen – Isah Hassan (35), Kori Kambo (35), Alhaji Mustapha (40), Bulu Umar (18), and Ismaila Babagana (32) – who arrived and began beating up both the cook and the policeman. They were saved by Olusegun Ajamolaya, the chief policeman of Bar Beach Division, who arrested all six assailants. (We are not told if he did this single-handedly.) “During the investigation,” our source informs us, “police discovered that the penis of the complainant was not missing.” Well I never! *pmnewsnigeria.com*, 25 Mar 2018.

For more on the strangely prevalent delusions of penis theft and *koro* (penis shrinkage) see **FT211:16-17, 238:16, 273:11** – where you’ll find further cross-references.

BALL LIGHTNING [FT249:14]



Scientists have produced something called a Shankar skyrmion, a knot of matter looped together by twisted magnetic fields that, just like a giant tangle of yarn, often only gets tighter when you pull on a string. When they created this weird structure in a quantum material, they realised it looked

uncannily like ball lightning, a form of lightning that forms knots of light that can last several seconds (a normal lightning strike is over in tens of microseconds). A recent paper in the journal *Science Advances* outlines the new discovery and its possible implications. “The biggest moment was when we realised we got the same electromagnetic fields as predicted for ball lightning,” said co-author Mikko Möttönen, a quantum computing researcher at Aalto University in Finland.

Möttönen and his colleagues started with a Bose-Einstein condensate, a seriously weird state of matter beyond the traditional solid, liquid and gas. To make this, rubidium gas is cooled to just above absolute zero, but in such a way that it doesn’t freeze solid. Instead, it becomes a mess of particles all in the same quantum state. Then, a loopy magnetic field was applied, which successfully knotted the quantum gas to produce the skyrmion in three dimensions. Scientists have long suspected that ball lightning was built by magnet fields, but didn’t have much evidence. The skyrmion work isn’t proof, but it suggests they’re on the right track. *Newsweek*, 5 Mar 2018.

VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT [FT130:42-46]



Greg Kondrak of the University of Alberta’s renowned artificial intelligence lab believes he’s cracked the baffling code of the Voynich manuscript, which has stumped scholars ever since rare-book dealer Wilfrid Voynich bought it from a Jesuit library in Italy in 1912. At least eight would-be translators have declared success but were later debunked, the most recent of them late last year. The manuscript has been carbon-dated to the early 15th century. One theory holds that it is a document on women’s health, but it is written in an unknown language, in an unknown script, scrambled by an unknown code. Its 240 pages, now part of Yale

University’s Beinecke collection, are heavily illustrated with plants, stars, planets and bathing women. Some plants match known species; some don’t. Some astronomical diagrams look like zodiac signs; some don’t look like anything from earthly skies. No one knows what the dozens of naked women in various bodies of water are doing.

Guesses at the language of its text have ranged from a type of Latin to a derivation of Sino-Tibetan. Kondrak thought powerful artificial intelligence programs could help. He and his co-author Bradley Hauer took the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and translated it into 380 languages. Using a series of complex statistical procedures and algorithms, they were able to get a computer to identify the correct language up to 97 per cent of the time. Putting the manuscript through the same statistical procedure yielded the hypothesis that it was written in Hebrew. Then they went after the Voynich code. The letters in each word, they found, had been reordered. Vowels had been dropped. Its complete first sentence, according to computer algorithms, is “She made recommendations to the priest, man of the house and me and people.” The first 72 words of one section yield translations that might fit in a botanical pharmacopoeia: “farmer,” “light,” “air” and “fire.” So – still a long way to go in reading the damn thing. Kondrak acknowledges the reception of his work by traditional Voynich experts has been cool. “I don’t think they are friendly to this kind of research,” he said. “People may be fearing that the computers will replace them.” *huffingtonpost.ca*, 24 Jan 2018.

VEXING HEXES [FT279:22]



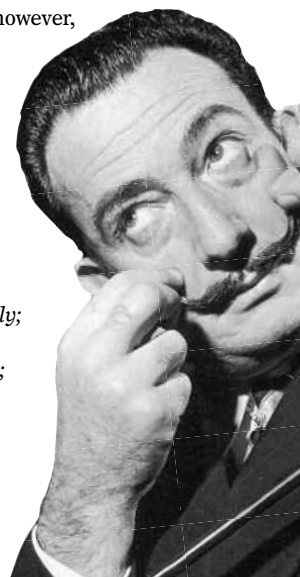
A piece of stone, measuring only 2cm by 1cm and taken from Abbeycwmhir in Mid-Wales, has been returned. It was posted to the Abbeycwmhir Heritage Trust stuck to a

greetings card made in China with a garden scene on the front and a message on the back reading: “I am so sorry for taking, borrowing, stealing this piece of the old Abbey of Cwmhir. I have been an avid follower of the Welsh kings and their history and so I took this rock. Ever since I have had the most awful luck as if Llewellyn himself was angry with me. So I am sending it back. I will not leave my name and address, just a heartfelt sorry from an Australian fan.” Llywellyn ap Gruffydd, the last native Prince of Wales, was buried at the Abbey and has a memorial stone in the ruins. *Shropshire Star*, 6 Sept 2017.

AVIDA DOLLARS [FT357:12]



María Pilar Abel Martínez, 61, a tarot card reader from Salvador Dalí’s hometown of Figueres in Catalonia, believed she was the product of a “clandestine love affair” between her mother Antonia and the surrealist in 1955, so a judge in Madrid ordered the exhumation of the artist’s body from the Dalí Museum Theatre in Figueres, which happened on 20 July 2017. Dalí was embalmed following his death aged 84 in 1989. The tips of his famous handlebar moustache were still pointing up in the “10 past 10” position. Genetic samples were taken from his hair, nails and two long bones. If Ms Abel’s claim were proved, this would have entitled her to a quarter-share in Dalí’s £350 million fortune. In September, however, the Dalí Foundation announced that DNA tests have conclusively proved the two are not related. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 22 July; *BBC News*; *Metro*, 6 Sept; *Times*, 7 Sept 2017.





EVEN WEIRDER UP NORTH!

Rob Gandy reports back from Weird Weekend North 2018

The third Weird Weekend North took place on 7-8 April in Rixton-with-Glazebrook, Warrington. As always, Glen Vaudrey had organised a rich, diverse programme, with the surreal Barry Tadcaster (aka Richard Freeman) and Orang Pendek Ken Jeavons compering.

Yours truly opened the first day's proceedings with *Fortean Sport*, a compilation of three *FT* articles: King Richard III helping Leicester City win the Premier League [FT342:56-57], the curse of Aaron Ramsey [FT325:53-55] and weird Olympian Games [FT343:46-50]. Interestingly, Aaron's goals were still culling celebrities; two days earlier, his performance against CSKA Moscow led to the death of darts superstar Eric Bristow!

Richard Freeman described his search for the Almasty across various ex-Soviet regions and highlighted its differences to other hominids; its more 'human' features make it taboo to hunt. He summarised many good witness statements collected in 2008, but unequivocal hard evidence remained elusive.

Steve Mera entertainingly addressed the old conspiratorial chestnut of the faked Moon landings, highlighting and analysing the well-rehearsed arguments. He had no doubt the landings took place, but suspected NASA was not entirely forthcoming about the technologies and finances involved, all aimed at helping the USA gain strategic advantage over the USSR.

Ann Winsper presented research into electronic voice phenomena (EVP), examining whether auditory misperception was a major factor. She outlined the phenomenon's history, and investigated links between EVP interpretation, people's paranormal beliefs and their personalities, categorising people into three types: 'Non-EVPers'; 'Low-EVPers'; and 'High-EVPers'. She detailed potential influences, ranging from anomalous background sounds to the power of suggestion.



The Tokoloshe's large penis can open doors or act as a periscope

James Newton explained how Native American attitudes towards Bigfoot – with traditions going back hundreds if not thousands of years – were totally different to those held by people of European descent. Bigfoot were both 'real' and 'spirit', or perhaps just another tribe. Some Native Americans saw Bigfoot as devils, some as guardians and some as creatures of the woods. James had spent time in America with various tribes and was struck by how children were given matter-of-fact advice about what to do if they encountered a Bigfoot.

The first day closed with Ben Emlyn Jones's talk about the 'show trial' of materialisation medium Helen Duncan in March 1944. Adopting an unashamedly conspiratorial standpoint, he set out key facts, including her apparently receiving messages from dead sailors when *HMS Hood* and *HMS Barham* were both sunk in 1941, despite the ships' fates not being made public. Her trial involved the top judge of the day and a chief prosecutor who was in MI5. The chief defence lawyer wanted Duncan to prove herself as genuine by holding a séance in the courtroom; this, unsurprisingly, was refused

and the defence collapsed. She was sentenced to nine months in prison (but released in September 1944). Why was she arrested long after the ships were sunk? Ben believes the Government wanted to avoid any risk of the D-Day plans being (inadvertently) mentioned in one of Duncan's trance messages, which might be heard by a German spy.

The second day began with Nathan Jackson's well-received talk relating the nefarious doings of the sub-Saharan goblin known as the Tokoloshe. Short, fat and hairy, is it made of flesh and blood, or porridge? Women raise their beds with bricks to avoid its famously large and versatile penis, which can open doors or act as a periscope. Stories of the creature offer widely varying descriptions and can evolve into everything from Zimbabwean UFO pilots to 'pinky-pinky', an entity that terrorises girls in school toilets. It is an all-purpose entity to blame for any misfortune, and arguably a social metaphor in African areas where belief in witchcraft is strong.

Steve Mera's second talk was about mysterious ancient architecture found across the globe that showed high-precision stonework. He challenged prevailing explanations such as "the Incas built them", by highlighting examples where structures that Incas *did* build could be seen alongside and were clearly inferior. Also, many locations featured large amounts of geomagnetic energy and evidence of machine-cutting. But what happened to this technology and who used it?

Glen Vaudrey gave a short talk showing infra-red and ultra-violet photography of orbs that has led to conjecture that UFOs might be invisible living creatures that sometimes become visible. Problems include the lack of an effective way of judging scale and the fact that the *only* evidence involves photos taken using exotic lenses.

The inimitable Bob Fischer took us on a lively tour through

depictions of the Yeti in popular culture, admitting the creature was his personal childhood bogeyman. Stories dated back to the 19th century, but the 1920s first saw the (mistranslated) term 'Abominable Snowman' coined. Things escalated in the 1950s with Hilary and Tensing spotting a giant footprint on Everest, and everyone buying televisions for the Queen's Coronation. From Nigel Neale's *The Creature* (1955), films and television depicted protagonists as respectful of Yeti/Tibetan traditions, but by the 1960s Yeti portrayal increasingly focused on children, with sceptical adults and establishment figures appearing stupid in comparison, as in *Scooby-Doo*. Nowadays, Yeti portrayal has moved from the original shy, retiring creature to a beast that will "tear anything apart"!

Finally, Steve Jones described events in 1990s Leeds that featured Goths invoking spider gods (possibly causing a city-wide plague of real spiders), bizarre altars in cellars, voluptuous females, fake occult diaries freaking out evangelical Christians, exorcisms, and Richard Freeman with Robert Smith-style hair in a *Masque of the Red Death* outfit being mistaken for a pirate. The last image was the scariest!

The weekend also saw a quiz in which two teams, each made up of speakers and audience members, answered questions about monsters, ghosts and UFOs. It was won on a tie-break. There was also a truly bizarre lard-eating competition. Only two contestants volunteered, with the (eventual; it was not a fast-moving event) winner being a bearded gentleman with a shaven head, dressed in a leather kilt, who (finally) said: "I like it". Both men received well-deserved round of applause!

WWN 2019 will take place 6-7 April 2019 at the Rixton-with-Glazebrook Community Hall, with tickets already on sale. There is a new website at: www.weirdweekendnorth.com.



KARL SHUKER examines a strange and controversial carcass that washed ashore in Georgia

THE VERY MODEL OF A MONSTER?

On 16 March 2018, according to news reports hitting the international media headlines shortly afterwards, what appeared to be a fairly small but very unusual 'sea monster' carcass had apparently been found washed up on a beach on Wolf Island in Georgia, USA, by visitor Jeff Warren and his son. Warren released a photograph to the media, which showed an elongate, grey-coloured carcass, which reputedly measured 4-5ft (1.2-1.5m) long, and bore two fins. One was a shark-like tail fin, the other a more flipper-like lateral fin. It also sported a long, slender, plesiosaur-like neck and a small head with short open jaws (which, Warren stated, contained small white teeth). Part of its abdomen was ripped open, revealing pink flesh and organs spilling out, and he claimed that gulls and a heron had pulled its internal contents out and were eating them until he came along and scared them away. He also made a short video, showing waves lapping at the edge of the shore where it lay, but he only filmed it from a single angle lying on its side, did not move it or alter its position in any way, and included nothing to give any scale. He then took his video and photo to the nearby town of Darien, where he supposedly learned about the local aquatic monster, Alty (or Altamaha-ha), said to inhabit streams and other watery areas around the mouth of southeastern Georgia's Altamaha River.

Various authorities consulted by newspaper reporters as to the carcass's likely identity – including associate professor Tara Cox from Savannah State University and former Director Dan Ashe of the US Fish and Wildlife Service – noted that when decomposing, a basking shark carcass becomes surprisingly plesiosaur-like due to the selective falling away of certain tissues and structures. By now, interest in the creature was such that there was talk of going to Wolf Island to examine it, but there were also claims that it had been removed by person(s)



LEFT: The 'sea monster' carcass that washed ashore on Wolf Island, Georgia. LEFT: Rick Spears's splendid full-sized model of Alty.

and head.

Others shared my view that this looked like some form of gaff – an artificial model. Indeed, German cryptozoologist Markus Bühler, who has prepared many very detailed, realistic cryptozoological models over the

years, stated in various Facebook cryptozoology groups and elsewhere that upon close perusal of the images, he was sure that he could see signs of hexagonal chicken-wire framework beneath sections of its skin, holding it in place and giving it shape, and he believed that it was indeed a gaff, combining a shark's tail with a wire-framed papier-mâché body, plus some real pink fish guts. Moreover, in overall form the model bears a definite resemblance to a longstanding, widely used drawing illustrating Alty that appears (together with a full-sized model of Alty by artist Rick Spears) at the Darien-McIntosh Regional Visitor Information Center, variations of which drawing appear profusely online.

This aspect also influenced educator John Crawford of UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant when denouncing it as merely a clay model (Markus Bühler, conversely, dismisses this, as he feels a clay model would have a different surface appearance from the one present). Dr Quinton White of the Marine Biology Institute at Jacksonville University announced that the consensus at his university

was that it was a fake, a view also shared by Prof. Ray Chandler and other researchers at Georgia Southern University. Nothing more has transpired concerning this most curious carcass, so we may never know for certain what it was, but in my view it was the very model of a monster rather than a real monster.

Markus Hemmler, <http://globsterblobsandmore.com/sea-creature-on-georgia-beach-2018/> 23 Mar; Markus Bühler, various FB posts and pers comms during Mar 2018.



unknown. Given the oddly limited nature of the images, I was already suspicious, and when I looked closely I became even more so, as the object looked far too substantial to be explicable by the usual suggestion of a decomposed basking shark (or any other shark type, for that matter). Equally, it did not look plausible as a genuine beast, as it seemed to combine too many elements from entirely different creatures – an unequivocally shark-like tail fin, but a more mammalian or reptilian flipper, and a very unrealistic-looking plesiosaur neck



STRANGE DAYS

MEDICAL BAG

This month's cases include a bright spark who lights up rechargeable bulbs, a surgeon who initialled his work and a gang of spinal fluid thieves



NEWSLIONS / SWNS.COM



EMMA SUNDEBÄCK

ABOVE LEFT: Nine-year-old Abu Thahir lights up an LED bulb. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Baby Benjamin, with the heart-shaped marking on his chest and following his life-saving surgery.

LIGHT BULB BOY

Abu Thahir, a nine-year-old Indian boy from Muhamma in Kerala, has become a social media sensation. He discovered he had a wild talent while returning home with his father Nizar after buying a rechargeable LED light bulb. Nizar, an electrician, told reporters that when he passed the light bulb to his son, it lit up in his hand. At first, he thought it was some sort of prank, but then he noticed that the bulb lit up whenever the electrical contacts touched any part of his son's body. Thahir's aunt filmed him lighting up the bulb with her smartphone and the video soon went viral. The boy is apparently embarrassed about his celebrity status on Indian social media, which explains why there is currently no high-quality footage of his unusual gift. He is currently lying low, preparing for the two school exams he has two take before the summer vacation.

Sceptics point out that none of the extant photos and videos show the boy's entire body, so it is possible that low electrical current is made to enter his body and he only acts as a conductor. However, 'expert' Joshy K Kuriakose asserted that the phenomenon could be caused by high salt content in Thahir's body, increasing his skin's conductivity. Curiously, he cannot light up any

old light bulb, only rechargeable LED bulbs. If he presses the two contacts on the bottom long enough, his whole body allegedly begins to heat up. *odditycentral.com*, 4 April 2018.

ONE FROM THE HEART

When Benjamin, a Swedish baby, stretched for a few seconds, the blood vessels on his chest formed the shape of a big heart. During ultrasound the next day, doctors discovered that he had a serious heart defect and urgently needed surgery to survive. The medical procedure went well and Benjamin, three months old at the time of the report, has fully recovered. His parents Filip Eriksson, 25, and Emma Sundebäck, 24, from Trollhättan in southwest Sweden, see the heart formation as a warning from above or some sort of sign. "Believe whatever you want, but I believe it's something beautiful. Someone wanted to help us a bit on the trail", says Emma. *Expressen (Sweden)*, 2 April 2018.

ABSENT-MINDED INJURIES

Dwayne Thompson, 26, woke up missing a fingertip – but had no idea what happened. He cannot recall anything after 10.30pm from his quiet night out with friends at a restaurant. He woke in a ditch near an old bus depot in Leicester at 2.30am, with blood

pouring from his hand. "We went for a meal with my girlfriend and her mates," he said. "We were having a nice time and only had a couple of drinks. It was definitely nothing more than usual... It's like I jumped through time to the bus depot." His friends were unable to help him fill in the gaps. *D.Mirror*, 10 Feb 2018.

Peter Wilkinson, 53, woke from a night out to find his ear hanging off, but had no memory of anything after leaving a bar in Exmouth, Devon. He had "a couple of drinks" at the town's Wing Bar and went to another pub at 12.20am before walking home. He needed 75 stitches to repair his ear, which was ripped from the top downwards and attached by a flap of skin. He was also covered in bruises and other cuts. *Sun*, 16 Sept 2017.

A woman went to hospital complaining of a headache, only to discover she had been shot in the head two months earlier. The FBI in Atlanta said they were hunting the woman's boyfriend Jerrontae Cain, 38, who they believe fired the bullet lodged in the back of her head. The victim apparently had no recollection of ever being shot. *D.Mirror* 3 Mar 2018.

SB WAS HERE

On 13 December 2017, a surgeon who burnt his initials "SB" on

the livers of two liver transplant patients with an argon beam coagulator admitted assault by beating. Simon Bramhall, 53, admitted it was "a misjudged attempt to relieve the tension in theatre". He denied the more serious charge of assault occasioning actual bodily harm – a plea accepted by prosecutors at Birmingham Crown Court. Bramhall committed the offences at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital on 9 February and 21 August 2013. The liver, spleen and pancreas surgeon was suspended later that year and resigned after a disciplinary hearing in May 2014. Liver surgeons use an argon beam to stop bleeding, but can also use it to burn the surface of the liver to sketch out the area of an operation. It is not thought to be harmful and the marks quickly disappear. In one case the liver transplant failed and the 1.5in (4cm) initials were found in a follow-up operation eight days later. Bramhall, once described as "the best surgeon of his generation", was fined £10,000 and ordered to do 120 hours of unpaid work for what the judge called an "abuse of power and betrayal of trust". Prosecutor Tony Badenoch QC said the case was "without legal precedent in criminal law". *BBC News*, 13 Dec; *D.Telegraph*, 14 Dec 2017, 13 Jan 2018.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

THIS IS SPINAL TAP

Pakistani police arrested four people accused of stealing spinal fluid. The suspects told women they had to provide blood samples to qualify for financial assistance from the government. However, they extracted spinal fluid instead, and attempted to sell it on the black market. The gang is thought to have stolen spinal fluid from more than 12 women. The authorities became aware of the scheme on 10 February after a man noticed that his 17-year-old daughter felt weak after the procedure. According to police in Hafizabad, the gang members pretended to be government officials carrying out medical research. They promised the victim's father a fee in exchange for his consent to a "blood test", saying the money could go towards his daughter's dowry.

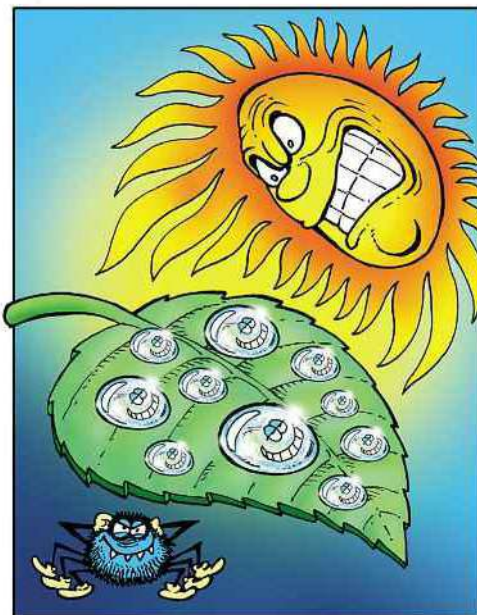
Spinal fluid is a transparent liquid found around the brain and spinal cord that protects them from shock and injury. It can be extracted by inserting a needle into the spinal canal, and is normally only taken to help diagnose a number of diseases. It was not clear how spinal fluid would be used on the black market; it was possibly sold to *desi hakeems*, or homeopaths. Hafizabad lies in Punjab's so-called "kidney fields", a route between Islamabad and Lahore known for the presence of organ traffickers. Pakistan outlawed the commercial trade in human body parts in 2010, introducing jail sentences of up to 10 years, but patchy implementation has eroded initial gains against the trade. In late 2016, police rescued 24 people held hostage by an organ trafficking gang in Rawalpindi. *theguardian.com*, 12 Feb; *BBC News*, 13 Feb 2018.

SHIRLEY TEMPLE PROTEIN

The World Health Organisation released a report in 2014 urging action to be taken to prevent the "post-antibiotic era", where common infections and minor injuries that have been treatable for decades can once again kill. Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria build up a tolerance against antibiotics and pass that resistance on to the next generation of bacteria, producing superbugs.

Back in 2010, Australian scientists discovered that platypus milk contains a potent protein able to fight superbugs. They've now identified why, and say it could lead to the creation of a new type of antibiotic. Platypuses are monotremes – a tiny group of mammals able to both lay eggs and produce milk. The weird semi-aquatic creatures have a duck's beak, venomous feet and are one of only two mammals able to lay eggs. They don't have teats; instead they concentrate milk in the belly and feed their young by sweating it out. This feeding system seems to be linked to its antibacterial properties. It's thought that mammals evolved teats or nipples because it was a sterile way to deliver milk to their young – but platypus milk being exposed to the outside leaves risks contact with harmful bacteria. The unique antibacterial protein their milk contains might be defence against that. The researchers found a quirk that has never been seen in more than 100,000 different protein structures known to biologists. It was dubbed the 'Shirley Temple' in reference to its ringlet formation, after the 1930s child star. *BBC News*, 15 Mar; *nypost.com*, 16 Mar 2018.

224: THE DROPLETS OF DOOM



The myth

You must not water your garden at midday, or during very sunny weather, because the droplets of water sitting on the leaves will act like magnifying glasses and burn holes in your foliage.

The "truth"

Even non-gardeners know this bit of ancient advice. You'll get it from gardening magazines and books, TV and radio shows, and from the gardening gurus among your neighbours and relatives. But – and this will not astonish regular readers – nobody had ever thought to test it until, in 2009, Dr Gabor Horvath's team, at Eotvos University in Hungary, used experiments and computer modelling to show that water droplets on smooth leaves cannot cause burning. In the bright sun necessary for scorching, the droplets will evaporate too quickly; besides, they sit too closely on the leaves for sufficient magnification, the "lens effect", to occur.

Sources

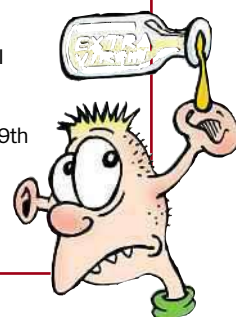
Gardening myths and misconceptions by Charles Dowding (Green Books, 2014); www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/01/100111091226.htm; <https://nph.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1469-8137.2009.03150.x>; <https://laidbackgardener.blog/tag/magnifying-lens-effect/what-does-20-20-vision-mean>

Disclaimer

This debunking has, as often happens, given rise to a myth of its own; it's now widely written that Dr Horvath has completely overturned the "no watering at noon" belief. In fact, the researchers found that droplets on hairy leaves could cause leaf burn because the 'lens' is held above the leaf, thus allowing a magnifying glass effect. In general, the hypothesis is proven false, but caution would be wise in the specific case of hairy foliage.

Mythchaser

In a recent interview a celebrity chef insisted that "20 years ago" you couldn't buy olive oil in Britain other than at the chemist, where it was sold for softening ear wax. I remember 20 years ago people saying exactly the same thing, referring to 20 years before that. And yet recipes recommending olive oil are found in Mrs Beeton in the 19th century, and in UK books and magazines throughout the 20th century. Can we establish when this myth, a strange mixture of self-congratulation and ancestor-shaming, first arose?



ABOVE: Four men accused of stealing spinal fluid were arrested in the Punjab.



Attack of the Slaughterbots

DAVID HAMBLING watches a video depicting a scary but plausible future of killer drone strikes

As a journalist writing about military drones, I keep getting emails asking, "Is this real?" with a link to a video clip. The clips show tiny quadrotors pursuing people and killing them with explosive charges. It certainly looks real. The clips invariably originate from a longer version that starts with a conference sales pitch by a Silicon Valley exec for a new palm-sized lethal drone.

Perhaps the best answer would be to say that it is almost real – and perhaps inevitable.

Anyone who gets to the end of the full nine-minute *Slaughterbots* video will see an explanation at the end from Stuart Russell, a professor of computer science at Berkeley and campaigner against killer robots. Russell says the video extrapolates our present path and highlights the risk of drones able to select their own targets.

The size of the drones in *Slaughterbots* is determined by the need to carry a lethal payload. Russell assumes that a 10-gramme warhead would be enough for a flying assassin, probably an underestimate. There is nothing that small in the inventory, the military preferring explosive warheads of 30 grammes or more. This is a detail though. US military agency DARPA is already working with swarms of pocket-sized drones. The project is known as Offensive Swarm-Enabled Tactics – OFFSET – and envisages hundreds of small drones working together to find targets in an area of a few city blocks. While the drones in OFFSET are not armed, a version with a deadly warhead charge would be a minor upgrade.

Insurgents in Iraq and Syria have already proven that consumer drones make effective bombers, releasing grenades from an altitude of a few hundred metres. In 2017, Daesh released videos of over 200 such attacks. In the battle for Mosul, the number of drone attacks was almost enough to stall the offensive against Daesh. The small drones were almost impossible to shoot down with machine-guns; one US commander noted that they had up to 12 of these 'killer bees' overhead at a time.

A BBC correspondent described the situation as "almost raining bombs." Iraqi Lt Col. Arkan Fadhil, injured in one drone attack, memorably commented: "It's annoying, with someone always tossing a grenade on you."

The Daesh drones, like their US military counterparts, are remotely controlled rather than autonomous. A human operator dictates their every move. Given how cheap small drones are – you could buy a hundred



LEFT: Students are taken out by deadly drones in the *Slaughterbots* video.

for the price of one Hellfire missile – it would be possible to field large numbers. But you would have to remove the need for one operator for each drone.

One solution is swarming, in which a group of drones work together as a single entity controlled by one operator. Recently we have seen spectacular light shows carried out by drones fitted with LEDs. At both the recent Winter Olympics and the Superbowl, constellations of drones have danced in the air, forming logos, words, images and moving abstract shapes. The biggest so far has comprised 1,300 drones, but bigger swarms are on the way – and some of them may be carrying bombs rather than lights.

If you send a thousand drones skimming over the battlefield, how do you find targets? Current Reaper drone operations require several intelligence analysts scrutinising the video feed to identify objects on the ground. However, thanks to artificial intelligence and Deep Learning, small drones can spot and identify objects on their own. In Australia, this technology has been used to create a shark warning drone called Little Ripper. This flies over the beach area and can distinguish sharks from swimmers, dolphins, boats and other objects – tests have shown it has better discrimination than a human observer. All Little Ripper's operator needs to do is confirm a shark sighting and alert the beach. The same technology might be adapted to spot tanks – or people carrying weapons. The US Army already has at least one programme under way for small drones to identify targets autonomously.

The threat of drone attacks, as well as the use of drones for smuggling and other nefarious purposes, has led to a boom in 'drone jammers', devices which block the communication between operator and drone. These are highly effective at stopping consumer drones (military drones are

harder to jam) but are likely to increase the demand for autonomous drones that do not require an operator.

Nobody has yet put together real-life Slaughterbots, but the technology is already in place and

simply needs assembling. This is not rocket science, and, as the video suggests, the technology will be freely available to terrorist groups as well as the military. In the video the drones use facial recognition and target people based on their social media profiles, an extrapolation of the current trend of crunching big data.

Slaughterbots is in the same vein as the scary, dystopian futures of *Black Mirror*. And, while the claims that it shows something real are hoaxes, it depicts a plausible future. What, though, is the alternative?

Current drone strikes often kill bystanders as well as the intended target. All too often the target is misidentified. This goes back to the first drone strike in Pakia in Pakistan in 2002, dubbed the "Tall Man" incident. The CIA thought an individual looked like Osama bin Laden, partly because of his height, and carried out a missile strike. The victim and his associates who were also killed turned out to be innocent scrap metal collectors.

Few would be sorry to see the end of the indiscriminate carpet-bombing of WWII and Vietnam, when aircraft targeted a whole area rather than a specific building or vehicle. And while current 'precision bombing' capabilities are massively overstated, Slaughterbots would be a step towards genuine precision attacks in which the target is positively identified from close range beforehand, and nobody else is harmed.

Slaughterbots may not be real yet, but they seem highly likely. It would be ironic, but far from impossible, if this much-feared technology resulted in fewer deaths.

You can watch the video at: <http://autonomousweapons.org/slaughterbots/>

David Hambling is the author of *Swarm Troopers: How Small Drones Will Conquer the World*, Archanangel Ink, 2015.

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Tatiana, 8 September

NECROLOG

Farewell to the serial cultist who helped start the Process Church and ended up channelling angels, and to the man who got nice work as a Gershwin pretender...



TIMOTHY WYLLIE

Timothy Wyllie was born in London in 1940 and would later speak of being traumatised by “Hitler’s bombs”. His father, George Haswell, was a successful young architect before WWII, and his mother, Diana Wyllie, worked for British Intelligence, both in Germany before the war and later at Bletchley Park with the Enigma code-breakers. They divorced when he was two. He was educated at Charterhouse and qualified as an architect at the Regent Street Polytechnic Architectural School in London in 1964. While at college he invented a system for storing colour slides, negatives and filmstrips that was subsequently marketed by DW Filmstrips and became the premier international photographic storage system until the advent of electronic storage. He travelled widely before settling in the US in 1969, and working for some years as a graphic designer.

In the early 1960s he formed a Mystery School with married couple Mary Ann Maclean and Robert de Grimston. The school developed into the infamous Process Church of the Final Judgment [see “Sympathy for the Devil” by Gary Lachman, FT134:34-39]. The church worshipped Jehovah, Lucifer, Satan and Christ. In 1987 American journalist Maury



Terry controversially claimed in his book *The Ultimate Evil* that the church was linked to the Manson family, the Zodiac killer, and the Son of Sam. Wyllie took the name Father Micah and became the art director of *The Process Magazine*. He travelled around Europe, Mexico and the USA with them before becoming the director of their New York headquarters in 1975. There he organised seminars and conferences on subjects such as OBEs, ET encounters and Tibetan Buddhism. Wyllie left the church in 1977. His account of his time with the church – *Love, Sex, Fear, Death: The Inside Story of the Process Church of the Final Judgement* – was published in 2009.

In 1973 he had a near-death experience, which opened his mind to the possibility of communication with non-human intelligences. In a similar fashion to John Lilly (1915-2001, obit FT163:26), he took mind-altering substances in an attempt to communicate with dolphins using PCP and LSD. During this period he claimed to have also communicated with extraterrestrials and angels. These encounters were chronicled in his 1984 book *The DETA Factor: Dolphins, Extraterrestrials & Angels*. With Alma Daniel and Andrew Ramer he wrote *Ask Your Angels* (1992), which was translated into 11 languages.

In 2010 he wrote the text of his illustrated cosmic creation tale, *The Helianx Proposition: The Return of the Plumed Serpent*, in a six-hour channelled session. In later life he recorded what he called Bozon music – improvisational jazz mixed with shamanic music. He illustrated his books with his own paintings. In 2011 he published the first of his seven Watcher books, *The Return of the Rebel Angels*. These books chronicle the Luciferian rebellion of the famous Urantia Book plus Wyllie’s time in the Process Church. The series is mostly written in the voice of Georgia, an angelic Watcher of the Seraphic order. In order to channel Georgia, Wyllie would sit in front of his keyboard listening to BBC talk radio on his headphones while relaxing his mind.

Timothy Wyllie, New Age cultist, born London June 1940; died New Mexico 4 Oct 2017, aged 77.

Paul Whyte

ALAN GERSHWIN

For 70 years or so, this man insisted he was George Gershwin’s long-lost son. He made his debut, anonymously, in Walter Winchell’s column of 17 June 1957, but his real coming out was in 1959, when *Confidential* magazine published a first-person plea. “I AM GEORGE GERSHWIN’S ILLEGITIMATE SON,” it

shouted, over superimposed profiles of George and Alan in which their respective hairlines, foreheads, noses, lips and chins ran along perfectly parallel paths.

‘Alan Gershwin’ was born Albert Schneider to Mollie Charleston, who he claimed was a dancer who went by the stage name Margaret Manners. He maintained that she was George Gershwin’s long-time paramour, whom he had met through his songwriter friend Buddy DeSylva. His story was that through the machinations of Ira Gershwin, George’s brother and principal lyricist, he had been fobbed off on Mollie’s sister and her husband, Fanny and Ben Schneider of Brownsville, Brooklyn, who had pretended he was theirs. He claimed Mollie had masqueraded as her sister when she gave birth, so Fanny’s surname went on the certificate.

After considerable consternation, genetically certified Gershwins and their loyalists came to see ‘Alan Gershwin’ less as a threat to their millions than as a crank and an annoyance. But many continued to credit a story that, while improbable, was also strangely plausible and appealing. Legions of fans were heartened by the thought that George Gershwin, who never married, had left something behind besides his music. How, they asked, could the handsome

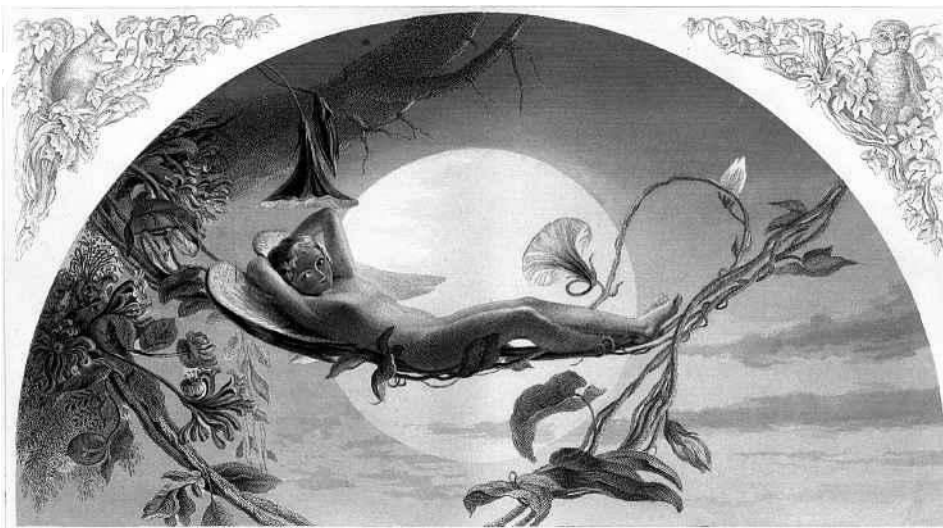


and debonair George, who died in 1937 at the age of 38, *not* have impregnated someone along his gilded way? How else to explain Alan Gershwin's encyclopædic knowledge of Gershwin lore and esoterica and a Manhattan apartment crammed with Gershwin detritus? And the 500, or 800, or 1,200 songs that he said he had written? More persuasive than anything else, though, was the jaw-dropping resemblance between George and Alan Gershwin.

"His idea of 'proof'," said Gershwin expert Robert Kimball, "is picking up awards in Kankakee or Sheboygan and using these plaques he got as evidence." For years he plugged his songs – with titles like "The Loneliest Heart in Town" and "I Want a Humdinging, Bell-Ringing, Singing and Swinging Love" – around the Brill Building; Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and others flirted with them, he claimed, but either never recorded them or failed to release them. One of his few successes was a musical setting of the Gettysburg Address performed at the Kennedy Center in 2009 and at the Lincoln Center in 2015.

Gershwin never took his case to court. And while family members were not about to provide any of their DNA, neither did he push them for it. His long Gershwin gig – signing autographs, reminiscing and lecturing on cruise ships and at concerts, cadging freebies and attention at jazz clubs and cabarets – was too enjoyable and, occasionally, lucrative. The further he got from home, the more respect he got. There were reverential interviews in Russia, Israel, Australia, Germany and Italy and, for several years, red carpets at Cannes. Once, he recalled, as 15 million people watched on French television, he got to descend a spiral staircase to "Rhapsody in Blue".

Alan Gershwin, pretender, born Brooklyn 18 May 1926; died Bronx 27 Feb 2018, aged 91.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

LEVEL FIVE POLTERGEISTS

There is perhaps no portion of the unknown where folklore and forteana lock steps so tightly as with the poltergeist phenomenon. Many are fascinated by young women in haunted houses who, in some unspecified way, conjure the poltergeist into existence. (I sometimes wonder if this is not just a modern reading of a much older myth – a Freudian lick of paint on the rock of ages.) I'm personally intrigued, instead, by how the phenomenon accelerates and decelerates.

First, almost all cases I've looked at begin with cracks and scratchings. Second, the noises become knocks and the poltergeist often answers questions – e.g. are you from Satan? One knock 'yes', two knocks 'no'. Third, the poltergeist attempts to move things but fails: plates are heard crashing down in the kitchen, onto the floor, but on inspection they are intact on their shelves. Fourth, objects are successfully manipulated: for example, thrown stones, smashed windows and a particularly ghastly subsection, fire-starting. Fifth, the poltergeist is glimpsed or a distinctive voice is heard. If glimpsed then there is typically an 'incomplete' cat-sized animal: anyone who has read the famous Epworth case will remember, with horror, the headless badger. If voices are heard, then, normally they say relatively simple things: "Hush, hush"; "The witch, the

witch" and so on. Some poltergeists never get beyond level one and are assumed to be rats in the skirting boards; the most notorious poltergeists play around level five – at least, on good days. However, star poltergeists do not arrive at level five overnight: they have to rev up. There is a prelude and there is a crescendo. Similarly, when poltergeists are dying out, they slip back down the scale. There

is a diminuendo: in many cases, the poltergeist no longer bangs doors or tickles feet in bed, but the family hears scratching for several weeks after the other phenomena have finished. Then all is silence. A curious modern example is 'Gef the talking mongoose' (see FT269:32-40), who clearly fits into the broader poltergeist family and who followed this pattern of rise, decline and disappearance in his farmhouse on the Isle of Man.

Why do poltergeists climb or try to climb this scale? I think of it as the struggle to communicate, to be noticed. It is almost as if 'something' wants

to speak to those in the house, to make an impression, but, at least at first, can't quite manage it. Of course, that gets us no nearer to what the poltergeist really is. Are we dealing with a 'spirit'; some kind of toxic psychological cocktail that has taken on a life of its own; or, the preferred solution of the Victorians, a disgruntled house-maid?

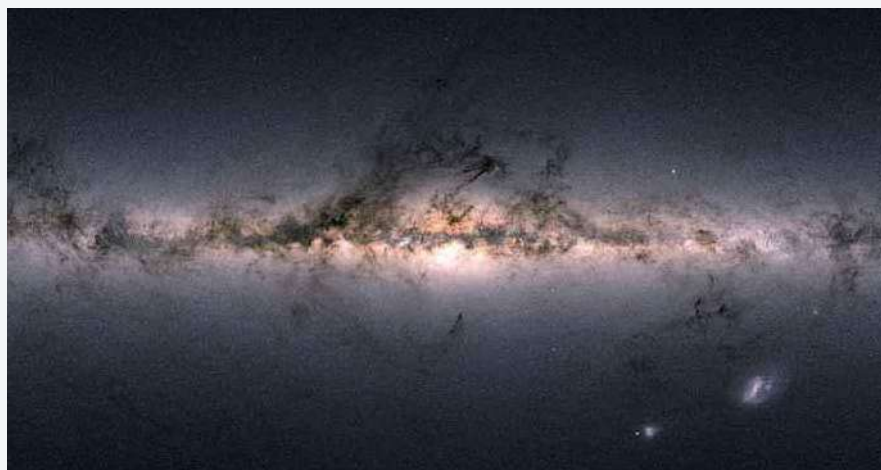
Simon Young's new book, *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* (Gibson Square), is out now.

ANYONE WHO
HAS READ
THE FAMOUS
EPWORTH CASE
WILL REMEMBER,
WITH HORROR,
THE HEADLESS
BADGER



Is anyone there? Am I here?

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research



ABOVE: A detail from the European Space Agency's Gaia model of the Milky Way.

DEATH PLANET FOR CUTIE

Interesting day, 23 April this year. St George's Day, Shakespeare's birthday (a most proper synchronicity), birth day too of wee Prince Louis of the present dukedom of Cambridge. Also the day when some people may have given a sigh of relief at its end, and a few others felt disappointed, for upon that very day the world was supposed to end. As far as I can tell, it didn't. O, No, not another tedious prediction, I hear you cry, but O, Yes, there it was, happily broadcast by *Express* newspapers, the *Sun*, and Fox News. The Sun, the Moon, and Jupiter would align in the constellation of Jupiter, said self-described Christian numerologist David Meade, and this (said the papers) would spark not just the Rapture but the appearance of the 'death planet' Nibiru and "a spread of madness, World War III and the rise of the Antichrist". Not much new there, then; notably the failure of any dread events to happen, whereas the alignment happens every dozen years or so. But I mention it because the alleged 'planet Nibiru' is of ufological interest in that it's an invention of the late Zecharia Sitchin, a writer of terrible scholarship and a contributor to the 'ancient astronaut' school (prop: E. von Däniken; see pp58-59). Sensible persons will wish the newly-hatched Prince Louis a kind fate and the best of luck, in the almost certain knowledge that while his lot may not be the most enviable, at least the world will not end on any day of his lifetime.

GAIA'S SKY

Of more direct ufological and indeed astronomical interest was the release in

April of astrometric data from the European Gaia space observatory. This consisted of a 3D representation of 1.7 billion stars, which is about one per cent of the Milky Way. The accuracy of this is enough to get the eyeballs out on stilts: Davide Massari of the Kapteyn Astronomical Institute, University of Groningen, Netherlands, said: "With the precision achieved we can measure the yearly motion of a star in the sky which corresponds to less than the size of a pinhead on the Moon as seen from Earth." This news seems yet to have reached the usual ufological suspects, judging by their silence on the subject.

I find this *piquant*, for it brought to mind the heroic efforts of Marjorie Fish to find a correspondence between the 'star map' recalled by Betty Hill, the 'grandmother of alien abductees', and some actual stars. Using information from the 1969 Gliese star catalogue, Fish laboriously constructed models of Sun-like stars within 15 light years of Earth, and peered at them from thousands of different angles until she found a fair match between her model and Betty Hill's map. From this it appeared that the aliens' home star was Zeta Reticuli. Other criticisms aside, Fish's conclusion fell to pieces in light of far more accurate data collected by the Hipparcos observatory, as detailed by Brett Holman in these pages (see "Goodbye, Zeta Reticuli", **FT242:50-52**). The Gaia 3D map ought to be 'data heaven' for those like Stan Friedman, who still touts the Fish model as useful, or to any ufologist with some programming skills and a computer well-endowed with RAM. First take out all but Sun-like stars from

Gaia's 1.7 billion twinklers, and then (having written the appropriate search program) hunt among the remainder at all angles for a pattern that resembles Betty Hill's post-hypnotic memory. My wager would be that a fair few candidates would emerge, though few may be within 15 light years of the Sun. Since the aliens allegedly regard both distance and lightspeed as no obstacle to their peregrinations, such a result needn't lose anyone any sleep. Watching ufologists swap insults over exactly which location to choose as Betty's aliens' home star would be fun to watch, though. I hesitate to suggest that this is why no one has taken much notice of the Gaia results – preferring the suspicion that ufologists really just aren't that interested in actual science – but the silence over them is certainly curious.

THE AATIPPING POINT?

An update, such as it can be, on the AATIP (Advanced Aviation Threat Identification Program)/TTSA (To the Stars Academy) farrago. The Great Silence from TTSA remains steadfastly in place as far as any information on the provenance of their famous three videos are concerned. No surprise there. Meanwhile rootlings by Roger Glassel, Keith Basterfield, Curt Collins and Paul Dean have established that at the DIA, AATIP was originally called, or perhaps nested within, something called the Advanced Aerospace Weapon System Applications Program (AAWSAP), the 'original' Harry Reid Project. We'll see what comes of that. Meanwhile (part two), the latest MUFON Journal has an interview with Luis Elizondo, which is bung-full of wonderful pseudo-science. But 'twas as nothing compared to the 'Statement from a Senior Manager of BAASS' published by Las Vegas Now. From whom we learn: "The BAASS approach was to view the human body as a readout system for UFO effects by utilising forensic technology, the tools of immunology, cell biology, genomics and neuroanatomy for in depth study of the effects of UFOs on humans... The approach aimed to bypass UFO deception and manipulation of human perception by utilising molecular forensics to decipher the biological consequences of the phenomenon. The result of applying this new approach was a revolution in delineating the threat level of UFOs."

Strange, is it then, that after a few years of this kind of stuff the DIA decided to close the project down? Or is it all now buried as part of the Great Cover-Up?



The Sonora Desert incident

JENNY RANGLES examines a recent mid-air close encounter with multiple pilot witnesses

On 24 February 2018 in the bright afternoon sunlight of the northern Sonora Desert, south of Phoenix and north of Tucson, Arizona, one of the most interesting mid-air close encounters of modern times took place. The desert was host to UFO events in the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, including a sighting in which an aircraft and control tower had a conversation as a UFO flew past the cockpit. In that fictional event, the pilot is asked by the controller if he wishes to report a UFO; after a pause, they think better of it. In real life, four decades later, similar events had a different outcome: they were recorded for posterity and released to the world.

"Was anybody above us that passed us like 30 seconds ago?" the voice of the pilot of a Learjet said to air traffic control at Albuquerque. "Negative," a radar controller replied. "Okay... Something did."

The Lear Jet, registration N71PG, was owned by Phoenix Air and was flying at 37,000ft (11,300m) at 3.40 on a bright sunny afternoon. The conversation between aircraft and ground continued as a voice came in from somewhere on the plane: "A UFO!"

"Yeah," the pilot added.

Three minutes later, an American Airlines Airbus 321 passenger jet was flying on the same air route at 40,000ft (12,200m) between Mammoth and Picacho towards where the Learjet had just been. Flight AL 1095 was en route from Dallas to San Diego and after seeing they were heading across the path of the object just reported, Albuquerque control asked the Airbus crew to look out: "American 1095, uh, let me know if you see anything pass over you here in the next 15 miles".

"Let you know if anything passes over us?" the pilot responded, puzzled by the unusual request. "American 1095, affirmative," the controller said. "We had an aircraft in front of you... that reported something pass over him and, uh, we didn't have any targets [on radar]. So just let me know if you see anything pass over you."

The Learjet pilot returned to the conversation to add more detail: "I don't know what it was... It wasn't an airplane, but it passed us going the opposite direction."

Moments later, the Airbus pilot was back on air: "It's American 1095. Yeah, something just passed over us. I don't know what it was, but at least 2-3,000ft [600-900m] above us... passed right over the top of us." Then the controller asked the Airbus pilot: "Can you tell if it was in motion or just hovering?"

"No cannot make it out... whether it was



a balloon or whatnot." But the AL 1095 pilot added that the thing had a "big reflection" as it passed overhead and was travelling "several thousand feet above us, going the opposite direction."

"Was it a Google balloon?" asked a voice seeking an explanation. "Doubtful," the pilot replied. To which another voice interjected with that word again: "UFO." This was the extent of the five-minute audio recording.

Lynn Lunsford, of the Federal Aviation Authority, later issued a statement to the *Washington Post* that the air traffic controller was "unable to verify any other aircraft in the area". They had no notification of military activity, which is common despite the busy commercial air route. Lunsford said that the FAA was looking into possible resolutions of the incident: "We have a close working relationship with a number of other agencies and safely handle military aircraft and civilian aircraft of all types in that area every day, including high-altitude weather balloons."

However, by early May, no such identification has emerged. In late March the pilot of the American Airbus gave an interview to local US TV station KTAB to describe what he saw. His name was Blenus Green, a former US Air Force B-1 pilot with 20 years' experience. "I was looking out of the windscreen to see if it was there and, yeah... I saw it. It was very bright but not so bright you couldn't look at it... It didn't look anything like an airplane." He added that normally an object lit by the Sun reveals that fact by illumination on the side; but this object was "bright all the way around. It was so bright you couldn't make out what shape it was".

The captain of the Learjet did not go public, but the boss of Phoenix Air confirmed that after talking at length to him they were baffled. They were afraid he would be "overwhelmed" with interest if they allowed him to do any interviews. However, they confirmed he was a 15-year veteran with over 14,000 hours flying time. That afternoon, the Learjet was in use as an Air Ambulance on behalf of the Military Air Mobility Command. In the debriefing with the crew,

both pilots confirmed they saw the object and said to one another: "What the hell is that?" Both remarked upon the brilliance of the light emitted, which "filled the whole windshield". They used their fingers against the windscreen to judge height as it passed in the opposite direction and estimated an altitude of 50,000ft (15,240m). The pilot confirmed he was familiar with science research balloons, but this object was not like any he had seen and had passed them at "a similar speed to an airliner", which would eliminate a balloon. So, what might be the cause of this event?

Firstly, let's consider the Google balloon that the Airbus pilot rejected as doubtful. Launched as Google X and then Project Loon, this is a plan to supply high-speed Internet access to remote areas using huge balloons made of super-thin polyethylene located in the stratosphere at around 55,000ft (16,800m) and carefully linked in a chain to harness high altitude winds. It was successfully tested in 2013 with 30 balloons, using parachutes to give controlled descent when each balloon in the chain reached the end of its individual operating life, up to six months from launch. These are large objects, meant to be tracked, and can even be viewed on aircraft radar software on your home computer. So, the lack of a radar return at Albuquerque suggests the pilot was right to find this explanation unlikely.

There are also many nearby military facilities, the most relevant being Fort Huachuca, south of Tucson, which operates 20ft (6m) wingspan pilotless vehicles on army training exercises. A year before the UFO sighting, one of these drones on a test flight headed north, passing through the region involved in the later UFO episode, but lost its control lock and disappeared. It was found days later, on 9 February 2017, in mountains west of Evergreen, Colorado, hundreds of miles north of its launch. With a nine-hour flight range it would have crashed when out of power. These 'Shadow' pilotless aircraft, known as UAV, are used for reconnaissance to send imagery to ground troops. They can be tracked on radar but are not designed to fly at great altitude and rarely reach an upper ceiling of 20,000ft; that a drone was climbing, lost control and reached 50,000ft while still functioning seems improbable.

So, given the familiarity of the air traffic controllers with military operations through civilian airspace, it would seem that some other kind of covert experimental technology was in the area, unknown to them; which means the Sonora case is as yet unresolved.

The Drama of Witchfinding

Michael Reeves's 1968 film *Witchfinder General* is a unique and disturbing work in the history of British cinema. **MALCOLM GASKILL** tells the story behind the film and traces its lasting impact on the treatment of witch-hunting on stage and screen.

The 1970 exploitation-horror film *Mark of the Devil* opens with an execution scene in 18th-century Austria. From a romantic backdrop of majestic mountains and turreted castles, the audience finds itself among murmuring peasantry anxiously anticipating the moment when two convicted witches, attractive young women, are lowered on pulleys into a blazing bonfire. Starring horror stalwart Herbert Lom, *Mark of the Devil* was billed as "positively the most horrifying film ever made". All the same, it had pretensions towards historical accuracy. Some portentous narration, read from gothic text scrolling over flames, reminds us that between 1400 and 1800 "nearly eight million people were convinced of heresy and executed by fanatical witch hunters".

Heresy and witchcraft were different crimes, and the actual death toll was more like 50,000, but the story in *Mark of the Devil* is far from supernatural fantasy. Vicious witch-hunts really did spring up all over early modern Europe. Scotland burned 1,500 alleged diabolists, the Spanish Netherlands 2,000, and some German city-states several hundred a piece. Things were more restrained in England, which probably saw no more than 500 executions. There the burden of proof fell on the accuser, acquittal rates were higher than the continental average, and organised purges were almost unknown. But in the mid-1640s, at the height of the Civil War, England's eastern counties were afflicted by a campaign against witches as brutal and terrifying as any that occurred in countries with a more fearsome reputation for anti-satanic bloodletting.

I once wrote a book about this story, *Witchfinders*, where I suggested that the protagonist, Matthew Hopkins, was more



England's eastern counties were afflicted with a brutal campaign

LEFT: Publicity for *Mark of the Devil* emphasised the exploitation film's focus on the torture of suspected witches. **FACING PAGE:** Jack Westgate's "repellent but not monstrous" Hopkins in the play *Covenant*.

a man of his time than generations of myth-making had allowed, hence the plural of my title.¹ The nation was full of religious zealots like him, and it took many people working together to kill witches, not a single leering puritan in a cape and a tall hat. The book wasn't trying to rehabilitate the so-called 'Witchfinder General' – something I never got to explain to the pagan who shouted "burn him!" at one of my lectures. It just didn't seem like good history to cast the witchfinder as a money-grabbing, sadistic misogynist exploiting political chaos to get his kicks.

At the same time, Hopkins was instrumental in causing the deaths of a hundred poor women and men. Riding out from the Essex port of Manningtree in the spring of 1645, he sniffed out suspected witches, encouraged their frightened victims, and offered his expertise as an investigator and professional witness in return for a fee. And in his insidious way, he sought me out too. In 2002 I was happily researching a book about supernatural phenomena during World War I when I was contacted by a TV production company, October Films, who had

been commissioned by Channel 4 to make a documentary about the Hopkins story for their *Secret Histories* strand. Their brief was to stick as closely as possible to the historical record.

The producer and director, both history graduates, responded to my doubts that the story could be told as they had suggested by sending photocopies of some amazing documents they had found in local archives.





ABOVE LEFT: Filming the *Secret Histories* Hopkins documentary in 2002: the laughter stopped when the witches were 'hanged' using parachute harnesses and fake nooses. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The author as extra, drafted in to help fill out a sparse crowd scene in the Suffolk town of Lavenham.

These included records of fees paid to Hopkins and his search-women (employed to identify the Devil's marks on suspects' bodies) and others involved, including jailers and executioners. Clearly a timeline could be reconstructed after all, and this used to create a meaningful narrative – perhaps even a book. The Angels of Mons, encounters with Christ in the trenches, and spectral soldiers in séance rooms all drifted back into the gloom of the past, and the Witchfinder General filled my field of vision, silent but beckoning menacingly.

October Films treated me like an equal partner. I helped write the script, made a few props (xeroxed trial records stained with tea), and went on the shoots in Colchester Castle, the Weald and Downland Museum in Sussex, and other picturesque locations. The reconstructions, using cheerful re-enactors, were remarkably authentic, and the director pushed everyone to the limits to spectacular effect. There was some silliness. The man playing Hopkins was not an actor – there were no spoken lines, only Joss Ackland's narration – but rather a motorcycle mechanic from Chiswick who was unsteady on a horse but did have an evil beard. Once, filming the execution scene in the Suffolk town of Lavenham, the director thought the execution crowd looked sparse. So, along with other crew members, I found myself in a pub toilet struggling into floppy shirt and hose and tights. I returned

I found myself in a pub toilet, struggling into hose and tights

to the gallows to see three condemned witches being squeezed into parachute harnesses. Everyone was laughing. But the mood changed as they were hoisted up and dangled there, feigning death, fake nooses round their necks.

Since then there have been other screen portrayals of Matthew Hopkins – or Hopkins derivatives. The BBC's *Horrible Histories* series made a spoof ad for a 17th-century 'no-win-no-fee' law firm aimed at victims not of negligent employers but vengeful witches. "Farmer Pocket of Crawley lost all his cabbages when they were eaten by slugs", went the spiel. "He lost literally several shillings!" The farmer calls in *Witchfinders Direct*, who suggest that the slugs were sent "by a strange old woman who lives in the village." The witchfinder, played by the brilliant Jim Howick dressed as Hopkins, promises compensation for his clients, which, in the case of Farmer Pocket, means death

for the witch and prison for her cat.

Like newspaper cartoons, fairytales, and Halloween costumes, skits like this suggest the witchfinder stereotype is more of an archetype than a stereotype, a unique cultural bogeyman haunting our history and dreams. As personifications of prejudice and persecution, witchfinders have acquired a mythic quality, and perhaps this is what tempts filmmakers and fiction writers to take liberties with Matthew Hopkins's story.

THE TRIAL OF ELIZABETH GADGE

Recently I introduced a screening of *The Trial of Elizabeth Gadge*, an episode from the BBC's *Inside Number 9* series, the twisted brainchild of *League of Gentleman* and *Psychoville* veterans Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton. The pair, who write all the scripts and perform the leads, nod reverently to Brian Clemens's *Thriller* series of the 1970s and Roald Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected* to create coiling, beguiling, menacing one-off stories building creepily towards a twist. *Elizabeth Gadge* is indebted to a number of historical 1960s horror films, including *Blood on Satan's Claw*, with a pinch of *Monty Python* and a dash of *Horrible Histories* in the bubbling broth. Here the Hopkins character is not the historical one, more the evil bastard of our imagination.

The Trial of Elizabeth Gadge is full of good jokes and superbly cast – especially David Warner as the dotty, parochial, prurient

magistrate, Sir Andrew Pike. Jim Howick, the *Horrible Histories* witchfinder, also stars as wavering accuser Thomas Nutter, his surname referring to a family at the centre of the Lancashire witch-trials of 1612. Shearsmith and Pemberton did their homework, including reading original trial testimonies, and so other historical fragments creep in. Anyone familiar with the true story of Hopkins and his companion John Stearne will recognise the reception of their fictional counterparts, Mr Warren and Mr Clark, as minor celebrities in the sleepy parish of Little Happens. And however stagey the witchfinders appear, the idea that they were on a mission to purge the godly state of England is faithful to what happened. Warren and Clarke are, observes Sir Andrew Pike to an assembly of villagers, “learned men [who have] witnessed much that is strange” – and they have a job to do.

Much of the comedy comes from the absurdity of the people of Little Happens taking the accusations against Elizabeth Gadge so seriously. But there is subtlety to the mockery. Disagreement between the witchfinders – Clarke’s wariness rubbing up against Clarke’s cast-iron conviction – makes good history as well as good drama. There’s no evidence that Hopkins and Stearne clashed, but witchcraft did cause differences of opinion, in subtle shades and wild extremes. This was true during the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment and at all points in between. The drama, as in real trials, lies in the problem of fleshing out the theory of witchcraft with hard facts to substantiate a legal case. Ambiguity and doubt necessitate leading questions and wishful thinking, confidently applied before the bizarre charges vanish in a puff of smoke.

Of course, *Elizabeth Gadge* ends with



a devilish twist that turns the premise of the film on its head. No spoilers, but we are closer to the classic historical horror of Robert Eggers’s 2015 movie *The Witch*, where fantasy – or, if you prefer, past reality – cuts across accurate historical reconstruction. “Things are not always as they seem,” Justice Pike tells his addle-headed tenants in a rare moment of clarity.

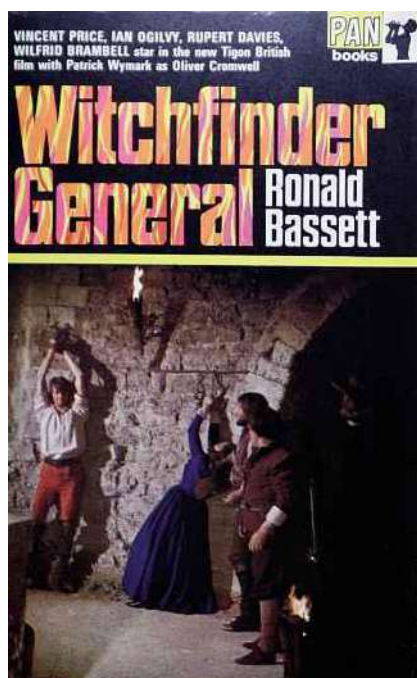
A SUFFOLK WESTERN

Cinematically, *The Trial of Elizabeth Gadge* most resembles the 1968 horror shocker *Witchfinder General*, which in 1970 had offered both commercial and creative inspiration for *Mark of the Devil*. The vigilant will even spot specific references in *Elizabeth Gadge*, such as a mention of roasting potatoes in the ashes of the execution pyre. Shearsmith’s humourless sneering, with some camp thrown in, recalls Vincent Price’s peerless portrayal of Hopkins. The screening that I introduced

was actually a double bill with *Witchfinder General*. And in the audience that evening was Euan Pearson, now in his 80th year, who had been the location manager on the film. We chatted, and he generously shared some fascinating anecdotes, of which more in a moment.

Witchfinder General was based on a novel by Ronald Bassett, optioned by Tigon Films even before publication. The director attached to the project was a 24-year-old visionary *wunderkind* named Michael Reeves. The director of two pictures, *Revenge of the Blood Beast* (1966) and *The Sorcerers* (1967), Reeves was aloof and introverted, with a bleak fatalism about himself and the art that possessed and obsessed him. The Matthew Hopkins of his imagination was British actor Donald Pleasence, but Tigon’s US partner American International Pictures (AIP) insisted on Vincent Price, well known to US audiences for a series of Roger Corman films based on the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Accordingly, the US title for *Witchfinder General* became *The Conqueror Worm* – after a poem by Poe unconnected to the witchfinding campaign of the 1640s.

Reeves was furious that Price had been foisted upon him, and did nothing to conceal his feelings on set. According to Ian Ogilvy, who played the hero Richard Marshall, Reeves had imagined “a weakling, a sickly little man, with bad breath and staring pale blue eyes... A cold, quiet, calculating monster, whose power lay not in his physical presence but in the dark recesses of a warped and vicious mind”.² This was not the 6ft4in (1.93m), flamboyant Price at all. Reeves doggedly tried to tone down Price’s performance, which the great actor endured to a point. An oft-repeated story has it that in front of cast and crew Price told Reeves that



TOP: Reece Shearsmith in *The Trial of Elizabeth Gadge*. ABOVE LEFT: Ronald Bassett's novel. ABOVE RIGHT: A poster for Michael Reeves's previous film, *The Sorcerers*.



ABOVE: A Suffolk Western? Ian Ogilvy and companions round the campfire. BELOW: The US release made a spurious connection with AIP's successful Poe adaptations.

he had made 34 films and asked what he had made. "Two good ones", was Reeves's droll reply. It is said that no one laughed louder or longer than Price himself, helping to create some grudging respect. But the mutual loathing persisted and was obvious to all.³

Other creative concessions included casting household names from TV, prominently Wilfrid Brambell and Patrick Wymark. Yet nothing would obscure Reeves's concept of violent exploitation in a bucolic setting, a mood that dominates every frame. There was, perhaps, a sideways glance at the Vietnam War – the peace of rural villages shattered by the arrival of righteously angry armed men – and maybe also a sign of the death of the Sixties: a long winter of hate after the Summer of Love. Reeves's biographer calls *Witchfinder General* "a unique vision of savage poetry and lacerating despair".⁴ The demonic evil of his earlier films, an externalised supernatural threat, transmutes into internalised evil, a dark human craving for revenge and death. According to the writer Iain Sinclair, Reeves's friend, the film was a "Suffolk western, a Brit cowboy picture: with extreme and painful scenes of mutilation, torture and execution".⁵

Beyond the individual, the natural world in *Witchfinder General* is beautiful yet indifferent to the suffering depicted – it may even be complicit. The script was written by Reeves and Tom Baker (not the *Doctor Who* actor, though he had worked on the series). One day they caught a train from London to Suffolk, where they hired a car

"Certainly, Johnny brought out the glory of the East Anglian landscape"



to scope out visually fetching locations, taking "mental polaroids" to use Sinclair's phrase. According to the critic David Pirie, "no film before or since has used the British countryside in quite the same way". The key, writes Pirie, is a sense of movement across English ground, through its weather and seasons. This pastoral nostalgia was helped along by Paul Ferris's stirring score, which by riffing around 'Greensleeves' evoked a strange but not too distant past. Reeves, inspired by *The Magnificent Seven*, and reinforcing Sinclair's insight, told Ferris that he wanted "English Western music". The imagery was also richly allusive. The location manager, Euan Pearson, calls cinematographer John Coquillon "the film's unsung hero". Coquillon's background, like Pearson's own, was in documentaries, which Pearson believes brings a certain quality to features. "Certainly, Johnny brought out the glory of the East Anglian landscape," he told me, "which is the true star of the film."

FILMING WITCHFINDER

Principal photography began in September 1967. The budget was around £100,000, but it never seemed enough. The executive producer Tony Tenser, an ex-cinema manager who knew what audiences liked, had founded Tigon Films the previous year in a small office in Wardour Street, Soho. A businessman, answerable to his investors, he was ingeniously resourceful. Most interior scenes were shot in two echo-ridden aircraft hangars outside Bury St Edmunds (which meant dialogue had to be re-recorded). Euan



AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: *The Devil Rides Out*: The casting of the imposing Vincent Price was a bone of contention between director Michael Reeves and the film's producers.

Pearson recalls how Tenser, determined to save on costumes, bought a job lot of grain sacks and dyed them different colours. The extras, mostly soldiers from a local barracks, complained because the sacks were still wet when they put them on.

Pearson remembers Tony Tenser as a charming, funny, devious rogue. Raised in the East End, where his family worked in the rag trade, he had clawed his way up to produce Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1966) and coined the expression 'sex kitten' for an up-and-coming starlet named Brigitte Bardot. He also ran a 'members only' cinema club in Soho. During the filming of *Witchfinder General*, Tenser returned from a weekend break in London accompanied by three glamour models he had cast as wenches – topless wenches, naturally – for a bawdy tavern scene he wanted for the 'German cut' of the film. Tigon had progressed to horror from sex, but its creator never entirely left behind his background and interest in voyeuristic sleaze.⁶

Tenser made *Witchfinder General* possible but he also made it uncomfortable. It was, says Euan Pearson, "a very hard film to shoot in every sense: long hours, frequent inclement weather, and rather a nasty atmosphere on set." Tenser dismissed unionised crew and drafted in dodgy local labourers. There was a strike, which Pearson helped end by stepping in as a mediator. Every day brought fresh challenges. One of Pearson's jobs was to translate Ordnance Survey references into what he calls "Left-at-the-Dog-and-Whistle-then right-at-St-

James's-Church" directions that the various drivers could understand. "I spent a lot of time racing round narrow Suffolk lanes looking for lost vehicles, props and actors," he recalls. Thanks to Tenser's penny-pinching ways there were few on-set facilities, and the construction gang had to dig latrines wherever they went. Local residents allowed the likes of Ian Ogilvy and Vincent Price to use their toilets in return for a small fee, but the novelty soon wore off. One disaster proved a blessing in disguise. When a bungled fight scene left Ogilvy with a broken toe and a limp, the insurance money came in handy for a cash-strapped director. "Thanks very much," Michael Reeves told Ogilvy. "Now I can shoot three scenes which Tony-bloody-Tenser has cut from the script because he says we can't afford them."⁷

Most of the on-set rancour, however, came from the irreconcilable clash of personalities between Reeves and Vincent Price. Euan Pearson witnessed a famous flashpoint – literally – between the two egos: "In one scene Vincent had to fire his pistol between the ears of a magnificent white stallion. Normally you'd use a silent blank, but Mike insisted on seeing the puff of smoke emerge from the barrel. Inevitable result: the horse reared and Vincent slid off the back... After that the relationship was poisonous".

Price was also given a unit driver who tried to impress him by speeding around Suffolk's winding lanes. After that, Price insisted on travelling in the production car driven by Pearson, who took him back to his hotel, The Angel in Bury St Edmunds,

every evening. They got on well. Often, they would stop off for a pint in Price's favourite pub, The Bell Inn at Kersey, where, Pearson remembers fondly, "he strode through the door in full costume and regaled the locals with tales of Hollywood". The pub had a resident mynah bird, which quickly learned to copy Price's drawl.

OVER THE EDGE

The film wrapped in November 1967. One of Euan Pearson's last jobs was to pack up the props van and send it back to the rental firm in London, driven by Tenser's cronies. It never arrived. Some of the antique weapons, however, did reappear when they were used in a robbery. The film, meanwhile, was edited and censored. Reeves argued that the excessive violence was an integral part of the film's message. The secretary of the British Board of Film Censors, John Trevelyan – a distant cousin of Reeves's – replied that in his opinion violence was being exploited as entertainment and, as with Reeves's previous film, *The Sorcerers*, horror had gone "over the edge into disgust".⁸ According to Euan Pearson, the then newly released *Bonnie and Clyde* had convinced Reeves that his movie needed more blood, and Tigon's American partners agreed. In the end, however, what most exercised Trevelyan was not gore but the lingering persistence of violence. A restored version of the film, available on DVD, indicates not so much that scenes were cut as that they were shortened.

When the film opened in May 1968, Tenser and his investors (including Michael Reeves,



GEORGE STROUD / EXPRESS / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Director Michael Reeves prepares an actress for her burning scene as Vincent Price looks on. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Tigon's Tony Tenser boards a plane for the US, as British movie moguls were invariably pictured as doing. **BELOW:** Richard Stainer as John Stearne in the recent play *Covenant*.

who had put in £5,000 of his own money) were relieved to find it a box office success in America and Germany as well as in the UK. The notices were mixed. Some critics understood that, for all its historical pretensions, at heart it was just a horror film and as such succeeded. Others judged it more harshly. Writing in *The Listener*, Alan Bennett claimed it was "the most persistently sadistic and morally rotten film I've ever seen", and that it made him feel dirty to watch it. In reply, Reeves said he wished he could have seen Bennett trying to wash away the grime: "It would have been proof that *Witchfinder General* works as intended".

At least one viewer changed his mind. Reeves received a letter from Vincent Price who admitted he now realised what Reeves had been trying to achieve, adding: "I do think you have made a very fine picture."⁹

Reeves never made another movie. In February 1969 he died from an overdose of barbiturates, alone in his London flat. Whether this was accidental or deliberate remains conjectural: the coroner recorded an open verdict. He was just 25.

Euan Pearson is among those who consider him "a genius unfulfilled". The critic Matthew Sweet calls Reeves "the attendant ghost of British film history... our directorial James Dean, our lost auteur of Sixties nihilism, Hitchcock's vanished heir".¹⁰ In the horror genre, his influence lived on, not least in the witch-hunting gore-fest *Mark of the Devil*, where Reeves's tortures and executions were relocated from Suffolk to Austria.

Alan Bennett claimed it made him feel dirty to watch the film



A TRUE AND EXACT RELATION

One of the mass executions orchestrated by Matthew Hopkins took place in Bury St Edmunds. In November 2017, I was there to see a brand-new play, *Covenant: A True and Exact Relation of Witches Found in East Anglia*, performed at the Moyse's Hall Museum. I had been hired as an historical consultant by the theatre company, headed by Greg Hanson and Hatty Ashton who also wrote the script. It was probably the most engaging, subtle and cliché-free reworking of the story I've ever seen. Jack Westgate's Hopkins was repellent but not monstrous, doing the wrong thing for essentially noble reasons but on such a scale and with so little self-reflection that his error ballooned into a crime. Tension between Hopkins and John Stearne, played by Richard Stainer, was cranked up by class and age and contested authority, but not by any doubts about the justification of their actions. That comes only later when Stearne feels the winds of political change blowing against the trade of witchfinding, forcing him into retirement. He exits the stage, figuratively and literally, looking hunted and haunted.

One of the great things about the play (which hopefully some fortians get to see when it goes on tour) is that neither witchfinder is a pantomime villain. Westgate's Hopkins channels the patrician posturing of David Cameron mixed with the angsty anarchy of Pete Doherty. It works. There are some terrific moments. The dreams of the virginal Hopkins are invaded by flirty witches who leave him in a lather. The object of his repressed desires



ANDY ABBOT

LEFT: The Bring Out Your Dead Productions/Witches of West Suffolk production of *Covenant* at the Moyse's Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds, November 2017, offered a brand new take on the *Witchfinder General* story. Here, Amy Wyllie appears as Elizabeth Clarke and Samuel Norris as Edward Parley.

is Rebecca West, a real character who informed against her own mother to save her skin. Betrayed by Hopkins, Hatty Ashton, playing the gauche adolescent, spits at the witchfinder, an impressive gobfull which hit my wife, by God's providence landing harmlessly on her theatre programme. For this was intimate, hard-hitting theatre in the round, powerfully emotive and historically true in language, mentality and sentiment. It also has some first-rate original folk music that weaves its way in and out of scenes, dissolving the action into something closer to a fairytale, albeit one where words and deeds respect the known facts and the morality is deeply ambivalent.

So Hopkins and I continue to shadow each other. And the book that came to me by surprise from making the Channel 4 documentary has now fed back into a play that may yet, I suppose, feed into a film – one that that does justice to the rippling light and shade of the true story. Many years ago, I had to endure an intense lunch meeting with Charles Sturridge, like Michael Reeves a youthful prodigy of British cinema, who had directed the acclaimed 1981 adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*. It seemed for a while that Sturridge wanted to make a historically faithful film about Matthew Hopkins. But it soon became apparent that what he really wanted to do was remake *Witchfinder General*, adapting the script written by Tom Baker and Michael Reeves in 1967. In the end, Sturridge didn't even do that. He decided to reimagine the saccharine dog-flick *Lassie*, and that was the end of that.

One of the best things about *Covenant* is the way it treats past belief seriously – an idea absent from *Witchfinder General* – and splices it into the audience's secular reality using clever phantasmagorical staging. Waking experience, then, merges with fantasy. I've long daydreamed about actually showing on screen the uncanny things that early modern witnesses said they experienced. At the infamous Salem trials of 1692, dozens of alleged victims described apparitions of their witch-tormentors. And during the East Anglian witch-trials, Rebecca West and the rest described in detail how they had made pacts with Satan or suckled demonic imps. What if an audience could see what they said they had seen, perhaps accepting this as an alternative reality from the past? After all, fiction depends on the audience's willing suspension of disbelief – why not fact as well?

The usual response to weird witch stories from history is to dismiss them as the product of mental illness or torture or, in the case of Salem, hallucinations caused by ergot poisoning. Perhaps witnesses were just lying. But we shouldn't explain phenomena away using modern categories when we might try to understand them in their own time. It matters what contemporaries thought was happening and why. Film, especially using CGI, could help. Images don't have to persuade the way words do. They are right there, before your eyes, incredible yet utterly literal. I used to think about contacting Steven Spielberg to tempt him with a new version of Arthur Miller's

Salem play *The Crucible* – essentially turning a political parable into true-life horror. I never wrote, but perhaps now I will... unless of course you're already reading this, Mr Spielberg?

NOTES

- 1** Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (London, 2005). For an account of Hopkins's campaign, see Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchfinders", **FT198:30-36**.
- 2** Ian Ogilvy, *Once a Saint: An Actor's Memoir* (London, 2016), p. 142.
- 3** The details of this story vary between accounts. This is Tony Tenser's version, quoted in Benjamin Halligan's excellent *Michael Reeves* (Manchester, 2003), p. 107.
- 4** Halligan, *Michael Reeves*, jacket copy.
- 5** Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* (London, 1997), p. 293.
- 6** Tenser's career is well documented in John Hamilton, *Beasts in the Cellar: The Exploitation Film Career of Tony Tenser* (Godalming, 2005).
- 7** Ogilvy, *Once a Saint*, p. 146.
- 8** Quoted in John Hamilton, *Tigon: Blood on a Budget* (Hove, 2015), p. 19.
- 9** See Halligan, *Michael Reeves*, pp. 196–8, 200–1.
- 10** Matthew Sweet, 'Michael Reeves: the lost visionary of British film', *Daily Telegraph* (6 May 2015).

♦ **MALCOLM GASKILL** is Professor of Early Modern History at the University of East Anglia and the author of five books, including *Witchfinders* and *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction*.

“Every old woman pronounced for a witch”

Even at the height of the witch mania that terrorised Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, some dissenting voices spoke out. **MATT SALUSBURY** looks at the witchcraft sceptics who began to change the way the Establishment viewed the supernatural.

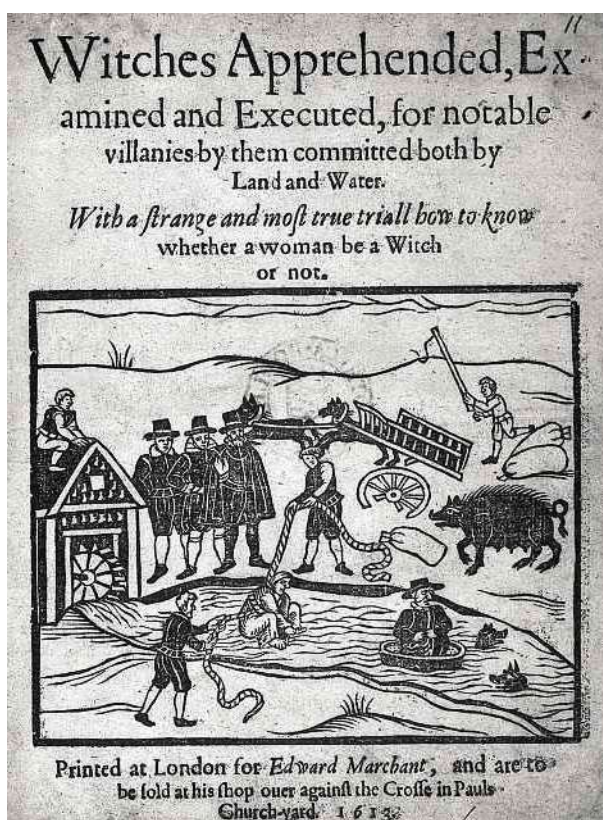
It takes courage to challenge the accepted orthodoxy of the day, to take on whatever madness has gone mainstream. In the Europe of the 16th and 17th century it was witchcraft and the persecution of alleged witches.

Just as important as “How did it happen?” was how to end it. After belief in witches had become so entrenched, how did society manage to talk its way out of it? There survives a rich vein of writings by those who stuck their necks out and expressed scepticism regarding the philosophical, theological and legal justifications for the witch trials. Some were themselves men of the Church; many were lawyers or judges who’d found themselves sitting in on witch trials. One was a physician, later seen as a pioneer of psychology.

Most sceptical literature on witchcraft was targeted at the men at the top of the social order, the “learned” gentlemen and scholars whose influence and opinion was so important in keeping belief in witches alive. For witchcraft trials, you needed not just fearful local accusers but also judges and “expert” witnesses – scholars, lawyers, theologians and physicians – to testify that witches existed and did the Devil’s work. These “learned men” could be found in surprising abundance.

Witchcraft sceptics generally trod carefully, going to great pains to agree that witches did actually exist. Long sections of their books were devoted to describing in detail the workings of phenomena such as sabbaths and compacts with the Devil, laced with biblical citations. Works sceptical of witchcraft usually emphasised, though, that witches were likely to be few in number, younger, male and politically influential, rather than destitute, eccentric old women with warts and pet cats.

Sceptics did not initially try to persuade audiences that there was no such thing as witchcraft, more that almost none of the



LEFT: The title page of *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed...* a typical work on witchcraft published in 1613 and showing the ‘ducking’ of a woman suspected of being a witch.

the witch craze had supposedly abated.

Scepticism about the existence of witchcraft was official policy in the Catholic Church for centuries. The *Canon Episcopi*, an influential treatise on Canon law dated to around 1020, condemned belief in witchcraft as part of pagan superstition. The *Canon Episcopi*’s position was that while the Devil existed, beliefs in witches were “delusions in the mind” created by the Devil himself. The *Canon* gave as an example the belief held by certain “wicked” women, devotees of the goddess Diana, that they rode through the night on “beasts” – except that they didn’t actually do so, they were just gripped by a mass delusion sent by Satan.

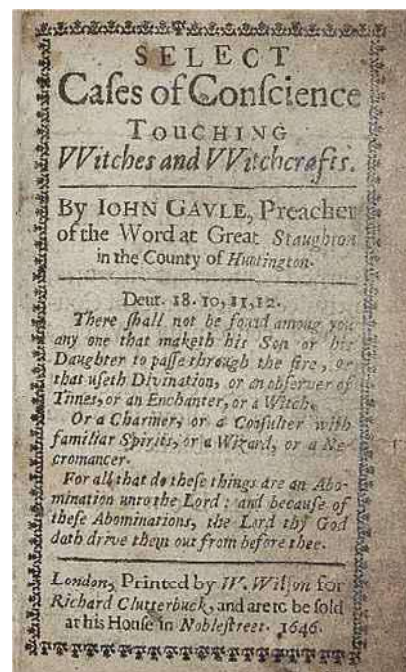
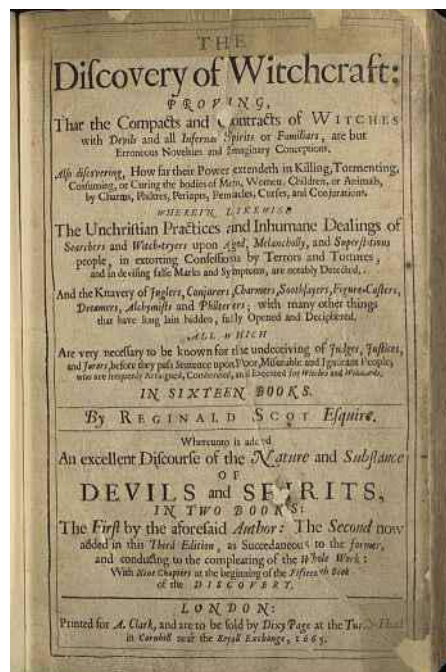
This created problems for the late 15th century witch persecutors. The most influential witchfinders’ manual, *Malleus Maleficarum*

(“The Hammer of the Witches”, 1487) dealt with this by re-interpreting the *Canon* to insist that the “rides of Diana” were real. The early witchfinding career of *Malleus Maleficarum*’s author, Dominican monk and inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, ended with him expelled from the city of Innsbruck in 1484, denounced by bishops as “senile and crazy”. Kramer appealed to Pope Innocent VIII, who responded with the Papal Bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus*. This officially confirmed that witches existed, warning that many “of both sexes” had “abandoned themselves to devils.” It empowered Kramer and his associates to prosecute witches, calling on the clergy to support him. This was important in kicking off the European witch craze, which took hold relatively quickly.

Protestantism inherited Catholicism’s then prevailing witch panic. The upheaval of

For witchcraft trials you needed not just accusers but “experts”

suspects paraded before the courts was likely to be the real thing and that the judicial process of witchfinding was flawed. Some witchcraft sceptics, though, went further, questioning even whether the Devil existed. As we shall see, sticking out your neck and saying that there were no witches and no witchcraft was dangerous even after



ABOVE LEFT: A portrait of Johannes Weyer, whose *De Præstigiis Dæmonum* was written in response to the influential *Malleus Maleficarum*. ABOVE CENTRE: Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584. ABOVE RIGHT: John Gaule's 1646 *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcraft*, denouncing Matthew Hopkins.

the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and the wars of religion that accompanied them, fuelled a tense atmosphere in which the denominations viewed each other as vast Satanic conspiracies. Lutheran pastor and witchcraft sceptic Balthasar Bekker, writing at the end of the 17th century, noted the ease with which even Protestants of the "True Faith" succumbed to the "error" of thinking that the Catholic Church was the empire of the Devil, while Johannes Weyer (see below) denounced an unnamed Catholic bishop who preached that Martin Luther was literally the son of Satan.

JOHANNES WEYER, born in what is now the Netherlands, was a student of the occultist and theologian Cornelius Agrippa before training as a doctor. He became town physician to the Dutch city of Arnhem. He asserted that "uneducated physicians and surgeons attribute what is really their own ignorance and error to witchcraft."

Weyer's *De Præstigiis Dæmonum* ("On the Illusions of Demons"), a rebuttal of *Malleus*, appeared in 1563 and became a Latin language bestseller. In *De Præstigiis*, Weyer argues that there are "magicians of ill repute" and "exorcists" – male heretics who employ the Devil's power to create powerful illusions through magic. He was careful to make a "distinction of meaning", to differentiate "magicians" from "witches". He argued that the Devil's power was not as great as claimed. Through natural laws, "God has established the limits in which He is willing to tolerate the Devil's activities". Most of the deeds attributed to witches were impossible – most witchcraft was psychological in origin. Those confessing to such crimes suffered from the "credulity" of the female sex, "the distorted imagination of melancholics" or

were "mentally ill"; Weyer is believed to be the first writer to use the latter phrase.

The Devil, argued Weyer, was an expert at obfuscating the truth, so witch hunters, by persecuting the "mentally ill", were playing into the hands of the Devil, with his thirst for "innocent blood".

One of the odder aspects of *De Præstigiis* is its detail on the demons that can be summoned by "magicians" and "exorcists" (but not, he argued, by the poor old women accused of witchcraft). He went into chapter and verse on how readers could summon these spirits to do their will. In a later appendix, entitled *Pseudomonarchia Dæmonum* ("False Monarchy of Demons"), he lists the complex hierarchy of Hell, with statistics on 69 demon kings, dukes, presidents and princes, their powers, how many legions of demons they commanded and the best time of day to summon them.

While influential in the Netherlands, Weyer's appeals for clemency for "poor innocent women punished" went largely ignored elsewhere. The physicians, lawyers and authors of the late 16th century waded in to oppose Weyer, among them King James VI of Scotland (later James I of England), who in his *Dæmonologie* (1597) insisted that witches existed and were "most severely to be punished".

King James also branded as "damnable" **REGINALD SCOT**, author of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which was strongly influenced by Weyer. An urban legend persists that James ordered the destruction of all copies of the book.

The Discoverie opens by lamenting how "The fables of witchcraft have taken so fast hold and deepe root" in England, to the point where English people "if any adversitie,

greefe, sicknesse, Losse of children, corne, cattell, or libertie happen unto them by & by they exclaimme upon witches."

Scot asks whether those accused of witchcraft are "worthy to die". Echoing Weyer, he also notes "how easily they may be brought to confesse to that which they never did; nor lieth in the power of man to doo."

He also introduces the term "witchmongers" – witch hunters and witchfinders, whom he lumps together with "papists". Many column inches are devoted to "Popish exorcists and other conjurers". *Discoverie*, like *De Præstigiis* before it, also covers thoroughly the appearance of the word "witch" in the Old Testament, going back to the various original Hebrew words later translated as "witch" and what they actually mean.

There are long descriptions of how witchcraft allegedly works, the Devil's compacts, how witches are brought to trial, tortured, tried and convicted. There are also lengthy critiques of contemporary writers who were defending the existence of witchcraft – of whom there were already plenty. The *Discoverie* was written at a time when belief in fairies was going out of fashion in educated society in much of England, so Scot compares witches to the fairy Robin Goodfellow (or Puck), who "ceaseth now to be much feared", while "witches' charms" are still widely believed.

JOHN GAULE was vicar of Great Staughton in Huntingdonshire at the height of the reign of terror of Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins (see pp32-39), during the turmoil of the English Civil War. Hopkins secured himself a commission to investigate witchcraft in the East of England, giving himself the unofficial title "Witchfinder



ABOVE: Balthasar Bekker and another man – probably Christian Scriver, but possibly Christian Thomasius – are pictured sieving diseases from devils in this engraving from around 1695. The diseases which are being sieved are: Raving, Melancholy, Sleep-walking, Irrationality, Delusion, Convulsions, Enthusiasm, Spleen, and Epilepsy. OPPOSITE TOP: Bekker's *De Betoverde Weereld* (1691). OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Balthasar Bekker in a 17th century engraving by Pieter Stevens van Gunst after Z Webber.

General". The total number of his victims, including those hanged, has been estimated conservatively at perhaps 230 or more.

In this atmosphere, where in the Reverend Gaule's own words, "The country people talk already... of the infallible and wonderfull power of the Witchfinders; then they doe of God, or Christe, or the Gospell preached", it took courage for him to preach against Hopkins from his pulpit and then publish, in 1646, *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcrafts*. This opens with what Gaule claims is a copy of a chilling letter he received from Hopkins, in which the Witchfinder tells him he is coming to his area and sounds him out on whether he will be well received and whether there are any "sticklers" locally who can be relied upon to pursue witches with zeal.

Select Cases eloquently denounced Hopkins, and how "every old woman with... a dog or cat by her side... [is] pronounced for a witch". Some of Gaule's sources include his interview with a "committed witch" who confessed, and one of the witchfinders, "as they call themselves", adding that "the office of Witchfinding is exceeding doubtful". Gaule asked whether witchfinders "aim not more at a privat Advantage, then at the publicke Good... Whether he may not give occasion to Defame Ten that are Innocent; before he discover one that is Guilty?"

Like most witchcraft-sceptic works, *Select Cases* didn't deny the existence of witches: "It is safe to believe that there are witches... But very unsafe to pronounce on such and such for witches, and that upon false grounds, as vulgar report, bare superstition, suspected Ancestors, decrepit age..." Furthermore, "No kind of Witchcraft may be named, which is not found[ed] on superstition", while incubi in particular were "the height of all fantastical delusions."

Select Cases was influential in exposing the abuses of the witchfinders. When the regular Norfolk assizes, briefly interrupted by the Civil War, started up again, Hopkins was questioned and retired shortly afterwards. *Select Cases* was also a book whose time had come. In the upheaval of the Civil War, Parliament's authority over the courts system had briefly slipped, allowing freelance chancers like Hopkins free reign, and now it was looking to re-assert its power.

SIR JOHN KEELING was Sergeant at Law – a junior judge brought in to assist the regular circuit judge in complex cases. It was apparently in this capacity that he sat in on the trial of the "Lowestoft witches", Rose Cullender and Amy Duny, at Bury St Edmunds in 1664. The difficulties he encountered demonstrate the power of expert testimony from those who firmly believed in witchcraft.

Duny was indicted for causing the death of a child, with testimony on "a great Toad" which hopped out of the child's blanket. Witness evidence, much of it from children, stated that Duny and Cullender had sent



Witchcraft "consists almost nothing else but the Tricks of Priests"

imps and "Lice of an extraordinary bigness" to torment them.

Keeling was "most unsatisfied" with the evidence, which he identified as based "upon the imagination only of the parties afflicted". He arranged a test in which the children, expecting to be touched by a suspected witch, were tricked into throwing fits on cue.

However, counter-arguments from the "most knowledgeable" expert witness – physician, author, philosopher, naturalist and antiquarian Dr Thomas Browne of Norwich – won the day. Dr Browne said that while

fits thrown by children were the result of hysteria, their hysteria could be heightened by the "the subtlety of the Devil", which was here at work. The judge didn't even refer to Keeling's arguments in his summing up: Duny and Cullender were convicted and hanged.

JOHN WEBSTER's *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677) returned to the theme of witchcraft as "a passive delusion of melancholy or fancy" and "utterly denied" all the usual testimony about a "corporeal league made betwixt the Devil and the witch".

BALTHASAR BEKKER, the son of a pastor from what is now the Dutch-German border, became a Lutheran pastor in Amsterdam and travelled to London, Cambridge, Oxford and Paris. An enthusiast for the philosophy of René Descartes, he drew on this in his three-volume *De Betoverde Wereld* ("The Bewitched World", 1691).

This questioned "upon which foundation the Christians in general, and the Protestants in particular, say such extraordinary things of the Devil". It included an exhaustive study of comparative religion, "The opinions of the Heathens concerning God and spirits", which examined their doctrines and whether they agreed or differed. He concluded of these "Heathen" superstitions about the Devil that "the witchcraft practised among the people proceeds from the same source". As well as "The witchcraft practised among the Jews" and in India, China, Africa and the Classical world, "very near the same opinions are to be found in America" among Native Americans. His survey of "Heathen" beliefs about the Devil found that "The Opinions and doctrines already mentioned have been most of all introduced in Popery... new inventions of men".

Of belief in witches, Bekkers concluded: "Those Opinions already deeply rooted in the mind as deeply as they can be; before the Holy Bible be ever read". Over the centuries, witchcraft "consists almost nothing else but the Tricks of Priests". Furthermore, "Some of the Heathen opinions upon this subject have in the process of time, kept in amongst the Christians".

De Betoverde Wereld also took on the army of writers whose intellectual contributions had kept "witchmongering" alive and well – "James the First" and Jean Bodin who "employ all their skills and capacity to confirm" belief in witches, and to anticipate witchcraft-sceptic opinions with elaborate counter-arguments. (Influential French jurist and demonologist Jean Bodin believed that evil spirits instilled doubt into judges, bewitching them so they showed leniency to real witches in court.)

That Christianity was just another religion among many, possibly sharing much of its "origin" with "Heathen" belief systems, was a discomfiting thought, while *De Betoverde Wereld's* suggestion that the Devil might not



MATT SALUSBURY

ABOVE LEFT: A memorial to Lord Chief Justice Sir John Holt in St Mary's Church, Redgrave, Suffolk.

exist raised questions about the existence of God. The book caused a Europe-wide sensation. It was a bestseller in several languages, although it never took off in England due to poor business decisions by the publisher of the English edition (*The World Bewitch'd*, 1695), which consisted of only the first part of the original (from a French version, although approved by Bekker himself).

While witchcraft trials had ceased in the Republic of the Netherlands by the time Bekker was writing, persecution of alleged “witches” still persisted in much of Europe. As a result of *De Betoverde Wereld*, Bekker was denounced as an atheist, stripped of his ministry and banned from many towns. But the City of Amsterdam continued to pay him his salary and formally kept him in post. He was later inducted into the Royal Society.

Contemporary with *De Betoverde Wereld* was **LORD CHIEF JUSTICE SIR JOHN HOLT**, a judge who is known to have presided over at least 11 witchcraft trials as far apart as

Suffolk and Cornwall, with every suspect before him being acquitted.

In the case of “Mother Munnings”, up before Holt in Bury St Edmunds on charges of causing her landlord's death by magic and for keeping imps, it was established that her imps were probably just misidentified balls of wool. Several “witches” accused of having witch's marks on their bodies, causing lice infestations or making victims contort, throw fits or vomit pins walked free after an appearance before Holt. So strict was Holt in establishing the facts of alleged deeds of witchcraft that the trial of Sarah Murdoch – on a “causing to vomit pins” rap over which Holt presided at Southwark – ended with Murdoch's accuser tried for “imposture” and her employers charged with assaulting her.

Holt was a man of great influence – he became Lord Chief Justice of the Court of the King's Bench, and a Privy Councillor – so his rigorous cross-examination of the so-called evidence for witchcraft helped turn the tide of legal opinion against the existence of the phenomenon. But he

wasn't just up against the superstitions of the common people. Many of his recent predecessors on the bench – such as Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale, judge at the Lowestoft witch trial – were firm believers in the need to prosecute alleged witches, letting through much obviously false testimony.

CHRISTIAN THOMASISUS, a German judge and philosopher, spoke out against witch trials (and trials of atheists) and the use of torture in his 1704 legal textbook *Kurze Lehrsätze van dem Laster der Zauberei mit dem Hexenprozess* (“Kurt's Theorems about the Vice of Sorcery in the Witch Trial”).

Sceptical works on witches had become rarer by the beginning of the 18th century, by which time witchcraft had fallen out of the judicial mainstream. There was less of a perceived need to engage a shrinking witchfinding industry in philosophical argument. The rise of the educated classes speeded the decline of witchcraft, with the errors of the witch trials eventually influencing the development of law.

But over a century after Lord Chief Justice Holt, being a witchcraft sceptic in the East of England in the early 19th century could still be a thankless task. One such local witchcraft sceptic, Richard Grey of Aldeburgh, practised as a lawyer in London before inheriting money and returning to his native Suffolk, making it his mission to travel around (often sleeping rough) for the next 20 years trying to convince whoever would listen that neither witches nor their imps existed.

This was not a popular idea. When he came to the Suffolk fishing port of Orford in the early years of the century, they so didn't like his ideas about the non-existence of witches that they tied him to a stake and piled up wood around him, ready to set fire to him. He only escaped when he promised never to show his face in Orford again.

◆ **MATT SALUSBURY** is a freelance journalist and regular *FT* contributor based in Suffolk. His *Mystery Animals of the British Isles: Suffolk* is out soon from CFZ Publishing.

FURTHER READING

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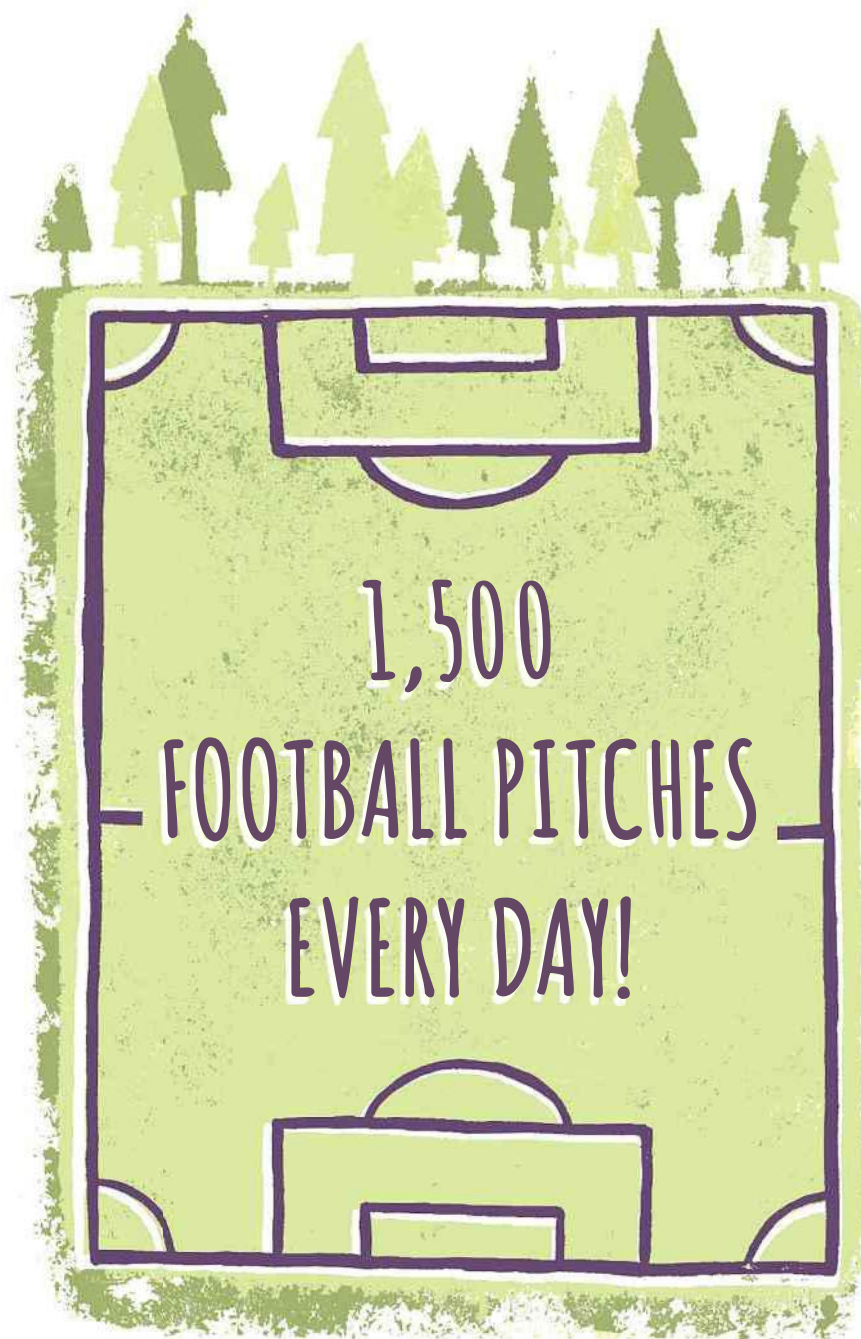
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Transportation by An Invisible Power: Part Two

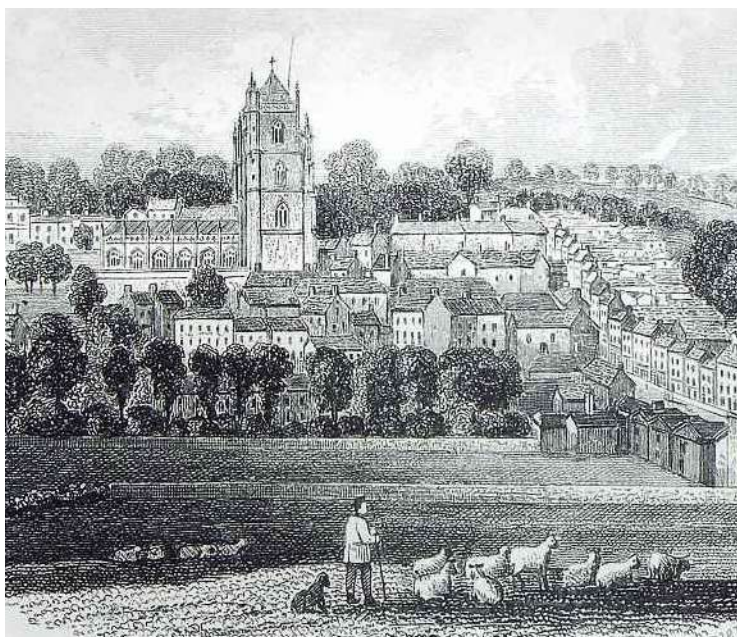
BOB RICKARD presents the concluding part of his survey of early British and Irish accounts of levitation and other forms of supernatural transportation. Here, he examines cases that include the mediation of supernatural entities, accusations of witchcraft and possession-like phenomena.

THE CASE OF RICHARD JONES

The earliest story in my selection concerns Richard Jones, the 12-year-old son of Henry Jones, of Shepton Mallet, Somerset. In the early afternoon of 25 February 1658, he was at the Richard Isles's house in the town; whether he was staying or visiting is not said. He went into the garden followed by Isles's wife so she had as clear a view of what happened next as you could ask for. She was "within two yards" of him when she noticed "him rise up from the ground before her, and so mounted higher and higher, till he passed in the air over the garden-wall." She clearly states that the boy was "carried so above ground more than 30 yards, falling at last at one Jordan's Door... where he was found as dead for a time." When he regained consciousness, he told Jordan "that Jane Brook had taken him up by the arm out of Isles' garden, and carried him in the air as is related".¹

According to the account, the phenomenon was repeated. "The Boy at several other times was gone on the sudden, and upon search after him found in another room as dead, and at sometimes strangely hanging above the ground, his hands being flat against a great Beam in the top of the room, and all his body two or three foot from ground. There he hath hung a quarter of an hour together, and being afterwards come to himself, he told those that found him, that Jane Brooks had carried him to that place and held him there. Nine People at a time saw the Boy so strangely hanging by the beam."²

The backstory – full of traditional witchcraft lore – began the previous year, in November 1657. Like Mary Langdon (below), Richard had been approached by an old



LEFT: Shepton Mallet, where 12-year-old Richard Jones was seen to "rise up from the ground" on several occasions.

at Chard Assizes, and most likely hanged or burned in the marketplace. Alice died in Shepton prison.

THE CASE OF MARY LONGDON

A few years before the levitating butler incident (see part one, **FT366:44-50**) we find Valentine Greatrakes involved in a case of poltergeistery and apparent teleportation in the town of Youghal, Co. Cork. This unlikely association is astonishing in itself but is a matter of record. However, where the fairy abduction

and supernatural transportation of Dr Moore in October 1678 (see **FT351:40-46**) was set almost wholly against a backdrop of Celtic culture and folklore, the event at Youghal – some 25 miles (40km) east of the county town of Cork – is heavily filtered through the English Puritan culture, including its legal prosecution of witches. The most famous of these involved an old lady, Florence Newton, who was imprisoned on 24 March 1661 on a charge of bewitching Mary Longdon, a young servant in the house of John Pyne, one of the town's bailiffs. Newton was tried at the Cork Assizes the following September, but is believed to have died before she could be executed.³ Of prime interest to us here is the assertion that young Mary was afflicted by fits and trances and, like Francis Fry (see below), was mysteriously transported about with extraordinary violence and found manipulated into seemingly 'impossible' locations or poses.

John Pyne's deposition states quite clearly

"The Boy was found strangely hanging above the ground..."

woman who begged for some food; in return, in true fairytale style, she gave him an apple, "stroked down his right side" and shook his hand. That was enough to bring on something akin to a psychosomatic collapse. Thereafter, the boy continually fell insensible, waking to declare that he had been visited "often" by Brooks and her sister Alice Coward. However, from the day Jane Brooks and Alice Coward were gaoled (10 March 1658), "he had no more of those fits". Jane was condemned

that “the Maid was removed strangely, in the twinkling of an Eye”. Like Richard Jones, she was moved around household locations, sometimes “out of the bed, sometimes into the bottom of a Chest with Linnen, under all the Linnen, and the Linnen not at all disordered, sometimes betwixt the two Beds she lay on, sometimes under a parcel of Wool, sometimes betwixt his Bed and the Mat of it in another Room, and once she was laid on a small deal Board, which lay on the top of the House betwixt two Sollar Beams,⁴ where he was forced to rear up Ladders to have her fetcht down”.

The phenomenon seems to have been triggered in the previous year (1660; some accounts set it at around Christmas) by an incident in which old Florence came to beg for some food at Pyne’s home, only to be turned away by young Mary. Encountering Mary later, on her way to do some laundry, Florence accosted her and is said to have kissed her violently. Undoubtedly shocked by this curious assault, Mary began to have frequent fits and trances in which, she claimed, Florence entered her bedroom⁵ and tormented her with curses and pins. Indeed, as if to prove it – like so many of the bewitched boys and girls of this period – Mary would vomit up pins, small nails, straw and wool; and, as she thrashed around, three or four strong men would struggle to hold her down. She accused Florence of bewitching her and the inevitable arrest and trial followed, during which Florence failed to complete a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. Despite many attempts and patient coaching by the court, she was simply unable to say the line “And forgive us our trespasses.”⁶

We note that these suggestions of levitations and teleportations occurred in the midst of a range of typical poltergeist-type activity. Bibles would be struck from her hands, and fly through the house.⁷ Classical forteen phenomena were recorded too. Mary became the focus for trajectories of little stones “that were thrown at her where ever she went”. Pyne declared that he had “seen them come as if they were thrown at her, others as if they dropped on her, and that he hath seen very great quantities of them, and that they would, after they had hit her, fall on the ground, and then vanish, so that none of them could be found.” And further, he said, “the Maid once caught one of them, and he himself another, and one of them with a hole in it, she tyed to her purse, but it vanished in a little time, but the knot of the Leather that tyed it remained unaltered.”

THE ‘DEMON OF SPREYTON’

Approximately 18 years after the aerial adventure of the Irish butler, as related in part one, we have the case of another servant: 20-year-old Francis Fry, in the household of Devonian land-owner Philip Furze. They lived in the parish of Spreyton, on the north edge of Dartmoor. Francis had been unexpectedly hoisted up into the air and over Furze’s house from one side to the other.⁸



*V. Greatrakes Esq^r
of Affane in the County of Waterford in Ireland.
famous for curing several Distempers by the stroke
of his Hand only.*

Pub.^d June 1799 by J Gaultfield. & J. Herbert.

ABOVE: The famed Irish healer Valentine Greatrakes was involved with not one but two cases of supernatural transportation: the levitation of a butler at Lord Orrery’s Irish home at Castlemartyr and an apparent teleportation of a young female servant in Youghal, Co. Cork.

This is described in a letter that John Aubrey received from Andrew Paschal who, in turn, transcribed it from a letter he received from an old university friend, now a minister in Barnstaple, Devon, some 25 miles (40km) from Spreyton. The letter from Paschal’s friend is dated 3 May 1683 and lets us know precisely when this transportation happened – i.e. on 17 April 1683 – because the writer declares that he happened to be passing by the Furze house on the very day the phenomenon occurred, which “which was Easter-eve”.

Francis Fry⁹ had been returning from work in Mr Furze’s fields when he was suddenly subjected to this terrifying levitation. According to the narrator, who knew many of the people involved, “[Fry] was caught by the skirts of his doublet, and carried into the air; he was quickly missed by his master and the workmen, and a great enquiry was made for

Francis Fry, but no hearing of him; but about half-an-hour after, Fry was heard whistling and singing in a kind of a quagmire. Coming to himself an hour after, he solemnly protested, that the dæmon carried him so high that he saw his master’s house underneath him no bigger than a hay-cock, that he was in perfect sense,¹⁰ and prayed God not to suffer the Devil to destroy him; that he was suddenly set down in that quagmire. The workmen found one shoe on one side of the house, and the other shoe on the other side; his periwig was espied next morning hanging on the top of a tall tree.”

The torment of poor Francis did not end there. The next day, a Saturday, the “part of his body that had laid in the mud, was much benumbed” and “he was so very ill, that he could ride but one mile or little more that night”. Nevertheless, in the belief that it

would relieve his 'fit', he was taken to the nearby town of Crediton to have blood drawn. The writer continues: "Since which time I have not heard of him, save that he was ill handled the next day, being Sunday." Now let's hear what Francis thought was happening to him.

FRANCIS FRY'S STORY

According to Paschal's informant, Francis's story began sometime in the previous year, ie. around November 1682. He was out in one of his master's fields, on the north edge of Dartmoor, when suddenly, in front of him, appeared "an aged gentleman with a pole in his hand", whom Francis, at first, thought was a mole-catcher. The stranger told Francis not to be afraid but to pass on a message to Mr Furze that his son had left several bequests unpaid. When Francis replied that his master's son was dead, the "Spectrum" agreed but insisted that the promised sums must be paid to the next of kin. If this was done, he would "trouble him no further".

Philip Furze took the matter seriously and, in due course, all but one of the bequests were paid. When Francis delivered the final bequest in a nearby town, the "man-spectre", true to his word, troubled him no more. As he set off for home, accompanied by another servant, a new menace appeared. The 1683 broadsheet (which gives more information than Paschal's correspondent on this point) says that as the two riders neared Spreyton, the phantom figure of an old woman "several times threw the young man off his Horse... with such incredible Force to the ground, which resounded with mighty noise at every

fall". This was witnessed by folk nearby "with great astonishment".

The writer of the broadsheet reveals that this aggressive ghost "resembled" Mr Furze's dead wife. Furze had been her second husband and she had previously been married to the deceased man whose phantom gave Francis the message about the bequests. Paschal's informant writes: "I knew her, and took her for a very good woman", but here she is, apparently channelling her fury at her first husband's bequests through poor Francis, manifesting as a violent poltergeist and persecuting her second husband's household.

The brunt of these frequently terrifying assaults seems to have fallen upon Francis and two other servants: Mrs Thomasin Gidley and young Anne Langdon.¹¹ Another victim, "a little child", had been frightened so much it had to be moved to another home. The phantom would sometimes appear "in her own shape, sometimes in shapes more horrid, as of a dog belching fire, and of a horse". At this point, we learn a significant detail: the phantom 'horse' was inside the house and appeared "to ride out of the window, carrying only one pane of glass away, and a little piece of iron".¹²

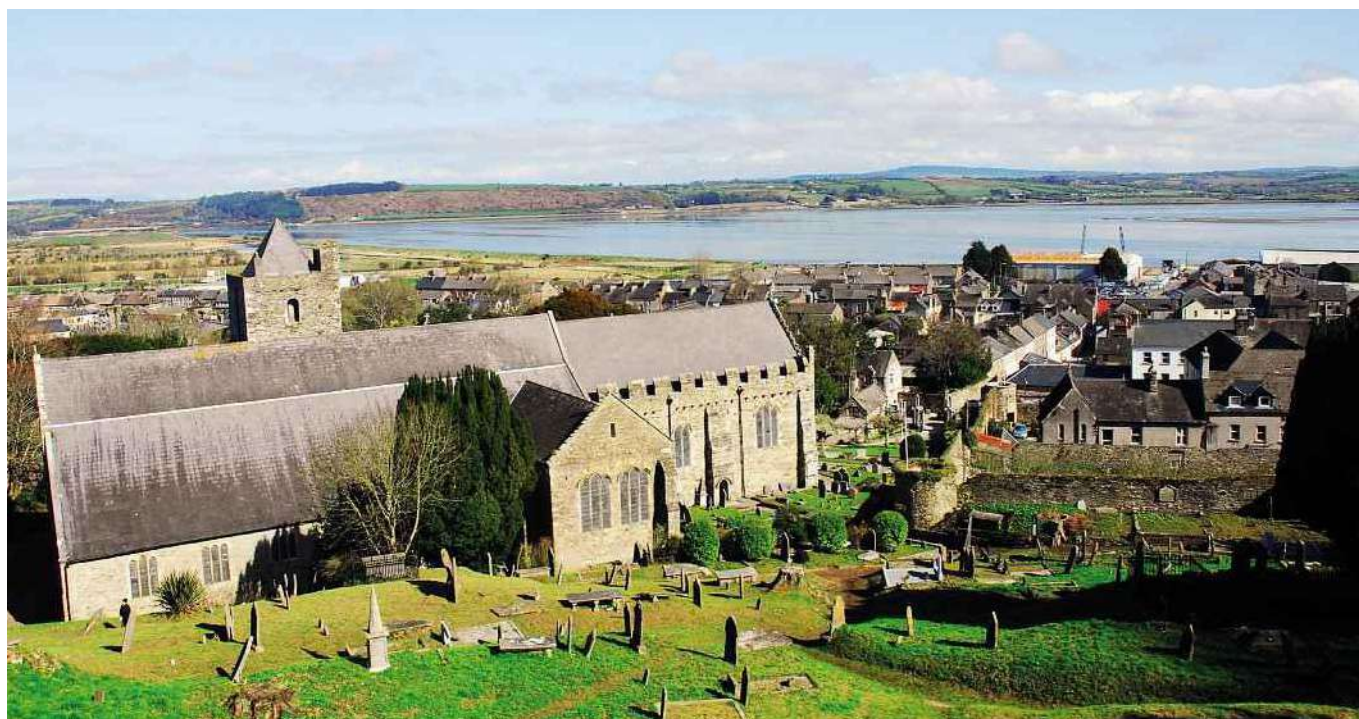
A scenario this paradoxical does not ordinarily occur in our expectations of everyday 'reality', suggesting some kind of *folie* or collective experience anomaly may be at work in cases with multiple witnesses. Besides the apparitions and moving objects, the torments suffered by Furze's servants are also familiar from other accounts of violent poltergeists: clothes being shredded or pulled apart, necks being throttled or

choked by cravats, and victims being pulled out of bed or pushed into strange contortions in improbable spaces "in the view of divers persons". As Francis continued suffering into a second year – accompanied by serious "fits" in which he was barely conscious – his health declined. Out of desperation, he was bled several times with no relief. Few were the days when he could work and, unfortunately for him, one of these was the day he was transported over the Furze's mansion.

Paschal's informant reports, sadly, that "Fry's mother came to me, grievously bemoaning the miserable condition of her son. She told me, that the day before he had five pins thrust into his side." She sought his advice, but there was little he could say that would console her. Gradually, the tormenting spirit left Francis for the other two servants. The informant continues, glumly, "[Anne Langdon] is come into my parish to her mother, and that she is grievously troubled there. I might have written as much of her, as of Fry, for she had been as ill-treated, saving the aerial journey. Her fits and obsessions seem to be greater, for she screeches in a most hellish tone." Adding: "Thomasin Gidley (though removed) is in trouble I hear." He ends by explaining that he "was so near, and passed by the very door of that house, and the poor afflicted people" of the Furze mansion, but he could not go in to investigate because he was of an opposing denomination. Even so, he writes, "I am very well assured of the truth of what I have written."

THE CASE OF THOMAS DONELSON

Finally, for now, I mention a remarkable



ABOVE: Youghal, County Cork, on the south coast of Ireland, scene of Mary Longden's mysterious transportations. **FACING PAGE:** This poster for the film *The Last Exorcism*, with its possessed figure pressed against the highest point of a room, recalls the case of young Richard Jones, who, according to witnesses, was found "sometimes strangely hanging above the ground, his hands being flat against a great Beam in the top of the room..."

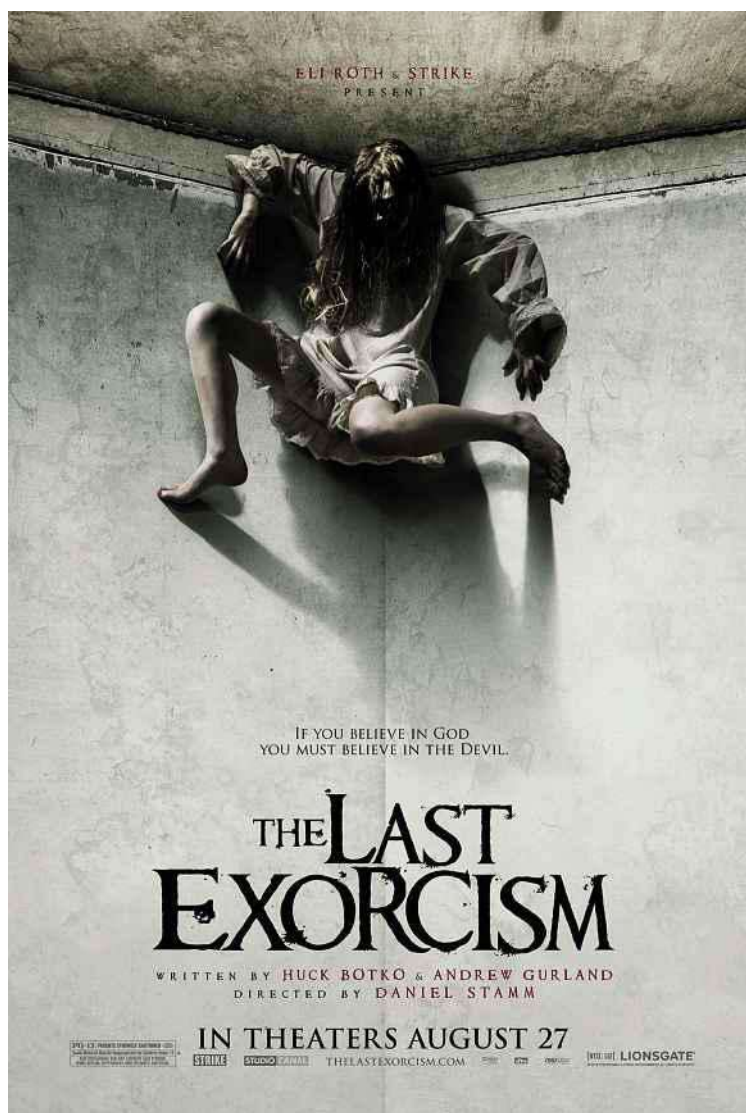
Irish case in which the curious circumstances were well observed “by many witnesses yet alive” who testified in the Assizes of Down Patrick in 1685. “Their examinations were entered into the records of that assizes, to the amazement and satisfaction of all the country, and of the judges, whom I have heard speak of it at that time with much wonder”.¹³

The events occurred during October 1685 in the small parish of Drumbeg, a few miles south-west of Belfast, following the death of Magdalen Lostin, who had sustained fatal injuries during an assault at the house of her son Charles.

A short time later, a neighbour, Thomas Donelson, who had witnessed the assault, began to be haunted by what he took to be the ghost of Magdalen, demanding him to bring a prosecution against the villain – one Robert Eccleson – so that she might have justice. The manifestations terrified Donelson and came to a head “upon one Lord’s-day” when the apparition “fetch’d him, with a strange force, out of his house, into the yard, and fields adjacent”.

Why Magdalen’s ghost chose neighbour Donelson instead of her son Charles is not clear; it is implied (but not stated) that Donelson was the only witness to Eccleson’s assault. Donelson became so frightened of a repeat experience that he begged other neighbours to stay with him, saying she would come one last time. And she did; calling from outside his front door beckoning for him to come out. His companions went to shut the door, but he forbade it “saying that she looked with a terrible aspect upon him”. At this point his friends “laid hold on him, and embraced him, that he might not again go out; notwithstanding which (a plain evidence of some invisible power), he was drawn out of their hands in a surprizing manner, and carried abroad into the field and yard, as before, she charging him to prosecute justice; which voice, as also Donelson’s reply, the people heard, though they saw no shape”. We might wish for more clarification of the word “carried”, but given the narrative’s careful wording, which emphasises the strangeness of the force, it is not unreasonable to interpret it as ‘lifted up and carried through the air’ rather than merely ‘dragged’.

Present were Charles Lostin and his wife Sarah, and several neighbours, all of whom later testified under oath in court to the reality of Donelson’s aerial extraction. Donelson himself, deposed to a well-known justice of the Assizes, Randal Brice, the details



“It fetch’d him out of his house and into the yard and fields”

of Eccleson’s assault of Magdalen Lostin. As to the fate of Robert Eccleston: the letters mention that he was eventually prosecuted and tried, as Seymour notes, by John Lindon, just three years after he was appointed a Judge of the High Court.¹⁴

Assuming the witness testimony is truthful, we have to wonder what could be the meaning of such a sublime manifestation of anomalous phenomena as levitation when it occurs spontaneously during a petty act of extortion which had no religious or mystical context? Was the ghostly drama a projection of Donelson’s guilt over Mrs Lostin’s death? Did Donelson have a latent shamanistic tendency? Once again, we wish for better records.

UP IN THE AIR OR DOWN TO EARTH?

What can we learn from comparing these cases? While some levitants have been stupefied by their experience, many were neither stupid nor uneducated. St Teresa of Avila, for example, not only left us descriptions of her well-observed elevations, she was also an acknowledged Doctor of the Church in recognition of her piety and critique of doctrine. Moreover, we have heard from witnesses who, when faced with an astounding mystery, have asked precisely the sort of questions you or I might under the same circumstances. Although they are not documented to modern standards, the cases I’ve presented include observations – often at close quarters – and I think it is possible to tell, sometimes, when an honest account is being given, even when the narrator is baffled.

One of the more immediate observations is the prevalence in these narratives of themes or motifs well known to scholars of folklore, fairylore and demonology. Examples of such motifs from the above cases include: warnings of the consequences of

accepting fairy hospitality; the sudden disappearance of the fairy company when their desires are frustrated or when ‘holy’ words are said (recall that Francis was “suddenly set down” as soon as he started praying); ghosts and even fairies conforming to human stature and solidity (not wispy or diminutive as in modern lore); the phantom who returns with unfinished business; divine or supernatural punishment for sinners; ‘bedroom-invaders’; and the quest for a remedy or cure of the suffering.

Then there is the matter of the ‘fits’ or trances – a distinctive state of consciousness not unlike a deep hypnotic state – in which the levitants seem to be insensible. That said, Francis Fry later recalled being frightened during his voyage over the house, yet aware enough to notice how small the house looked below him. This paradoxical state of consciousness – in which dissociation coincides with limited conscious observation and action – is not unlike that described in shamanic ‘trances’ and the undoubtedly-related state observed of some ‘witches’ who believed they had travelled through the air to a sabbat. An early explanation of their insensate bodies was that they had been



ABOVE: The classic cinematic treatment of involuntary levitation as the “the primary sign of possession” in William Friedkin’s 1973 film *The Exorcist*.

substituted by the Devil or demons in a similar manner to the way fairies substituted ‘changelings’ for kidnapped children.

These ‘twilight’ experiences were studied by David Hufford (*The Terror That Comes by Night*, 1982), who showed how they had a cultural continuity – the imagery varying with the cultural context – from ‘Night Hag’ and *succubi*, to modern ‘bedroom invaders’ and aliens. Typically, the sleeper becomes conscious while still dreaming, unable to move or wake up, or alert nearby sleepers; something like this was reported by the butler (the night the ghost brought him a ‘potion’).

Examples of elevations and associated convulsions or ‘fits’ are met throughout the various genres I have described. In demonological literature, levitation is often given as the primary sign of ‘possession’ and the possessed are almost always said to be sufficiently powerful to resist the efforts of “several strong men” to counter them. In older tales of experiential anomalies, we often hear of the levitant either experiencing a ‘fit’ during the phenomenon, or afterwards – like the butler and Francis Fry – “falling senseless”, enduring these ‘fits’ for some time afterwards. Of course, descriptive language then was not as informed as it is today, but we get the general sense of a trance or state of unconsciousness coinciding with the perceived immovability of the levitant.

The flights themselves often take place adjacent to or concurrently with classical poltergeist hauntings. This is sometimes a buried detail, almost as if it were a thing beyond understanding and too fantastic to mention, even in a story with other ‘fantastic’ ghostly phenomena.

Other references could be cited on the matter of folk who, on seeing a fairy gathering, are warned of the drastic (sometimes fatal) consequence of joining their company. The warning comes from the shade of someone they once knew but who was now dead, or sometimes by one of the company, sometimes invisible, sometimes not. The butler, Francis Fry, Thomas Donelson, Mary Longdon and Richard Jones were all pestered by spectral forms of various types.

Many clues are embedded in the stories. For instance, in the Spreyton case, the ghost or spirit admits to having been a loose man during his life and his punishment is to be compelled to be “hurried up and down” among the fairy host “and shall be until Judgement day.” Behind this Puritan language of sin and punishment we glimpse the older rural Gaelic belief that the recently dead can be seen among the fairy host, especially when it flies at night in a great wind. Across the Gaelic-Celtic world, this sinister aspect of the chaotic fairy ride was called *sluagh* and was believed to be responsible for kidnapping and particularly

transporting unwary people. And in the parts of Ireland with a stronger Protestant heritage, it is not pagan elementals but the spirits of the dead that empower the levitational force. The frightening danger of the spontaneous levitation of the unwary and the undisciplined contrasts distinctly with the serene elevations of sages and saints.

In establishing the authenticity of the facts of the matter, it is only right that we consider the possibility of fraud, credulity, connivance, and deception, or of such ‘honest’ errors as misperception (poor observation and judgement) and misunderstanding (credulity and pious fraud), as well as the role of fantasy in confessions under duress. However, to reject everything *a priori* as imposture is just as much an error of method as being too credulous, applying faulty logic, or of failing to recognise the importance of cultural context in shaping the way the initial experiences are first told and then propagated through reporting media. In a future article, I will explain the method used by Olivier Leroy to assess the reliability of historical accounts, which he devised for his 1928 analysis of more than 200 hagiographical accounts of levitation.

➡ **BOB RICKARD** started *Fortean Times* in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles on *fortean*.

NOTES

1. Recorded as 'Relation 2' in Glanvill's *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681), pp118-127. There is an online transcription available at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A42824.0001.001/1:19.2?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

2. A similar feat was reported of Mr Meredith's children in 1683 some 26 years later; see part 1.

3. My account is summarised chiefly from 'Relation 7' of Glanvill's *Sadducismus, op.cit.*, pp168-190, with added details from St John D Seymour, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology* (Dublin, 1913), pp105-131, who cites from the rare *Witchcraft further displayed* (1712) by Francis Bragge. Greatrakes's family were well known, rich, local farming gentry (see notes in part one). After the Civil War, he retired to farming at Affane. For a while he was appointed Clerk of the Peace for County Cork, and also a Justice of the Peace, positions he lost after the Restoration of the monarchy. Shortly after Florence Newton's arrest in March 1661, Greatrakes was part of a panel of three inquisitors which visited Florence in her Youghal prison cell, in the company of two other men, Greatrakes having "read of a way to discover a witch". Florence was seated on a stool and a shoemaker was pressed to stab one of his large awls into the stool. In a grim farce, he failed three times, but when Florence was unseated the awl struck hard and broke off. Dissatisfied, they had Mary hold another awl and stab at Florence's hand; this awl bent on Florence's skin. One of the men took a small, sharp knife and made an inch and a half long gash in the old lady's hand. When this did not bleed, he did the same to her other hand. Only "then they bled." If you are wondering how the town officials could countenance such a cavalier and cruel experiment, the atmosphere was such that even the Mayor of Youghal had acquired a boat ready to take Florence out into deep water and 'float' her. Edward Perry, one of a party of inquisitors who tortured the 'witch' was, three years later, appointed "Bailiff of Youghal" along with John Pyne, Mary's employer; and Perry, in 1674, became Mayor. We know nothing of the third member, Mr Blackwall.



4. Interior roofing supports or joists.

5. "Within a few Days... [Mary] saw a Woman with a Vail over her Face stand by her bedside, and one standing by her like a little old Man in Silk Cloaths, and that this Man whom she took to be a Spirit drew the Vail off the Woman's Face, and then she knew it to be Goody Newton: and that the Spirit spoke to the Defendant and would have her promise him to follow his advice and she would have all things after her own Heart, to which she says she answered that she would have nothing to say to him, for her trust was in the Lord." Seymour, *op.cit.*, p109f. Appearing as a phantom or within someone else's dream – called 'spectral evidence' – could hardly be disproved and, as at Salem for example, led to the executions of many unfortunates.

6. Seymour (after Glanvill), *op.cit.*, pp115-116, 125-126. Florence Newton faced two separate charges: bewitching Mary Longdon (for which she was committed to Youghal prison on 24 March 1661), and within a few weeks she faced the Cork Assizes charged with causing the death of a man who visited her in prison. Despite this high profile, and the case

LEFT: Various supernatural goings-on, including witches, imps and a fairy ring, from the frontispiece to Richard Bovet's *Pandæmonium* of 1684.

becoming so notorious that the Attorney-General was brought to prosecute it, there exists no record of the court's verdict or Florence's almost certain fate. Glanvill says his data came from a "copy of an Authentick Record" signed in the margin "W Aston", whom Seymour (p130) identifies as the judge Sir William Aston (d.1671).

7. In a significant number of

cases, an orthodox 'exorcism' fails to bring relief. Exorcisms of poltergeists, in particular, are on record as provoking spectacular backlashes against priests.

8. There are three primary contemporary sources for this story: a) an anonymous broadsheet: *A Narrative of the demon of Spraiton in a letter from a person of quality in the county of Devon to a gentleman in London...* (1683). B) Richard Bovet's *Pandæmonium, or the Devil's Cloyster* (1684), pp182-183 – online at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A28908.0001.001/1:5.2?rgn=div2;view=fulltext> – which identifies the author as "T.C. Esq.,". And c) Paschal's letter to Aubrey, reprinted in his *Miscellanies* (1696), chapter 14, pp114-121, online at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A26190.0001.001/1:6.2?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

9. Paschal gives the boy's surname as 'Fry', where Bovet's versions have 'Fey'. Some careless modern derivatives include 'Pry' and even 'Frey'.

10. Despite Francis's state of mind being described by the author of the 1683 broadsheet as a "Trance or Extatick Fit", it is interesting to note here the assertion that he was conscious and sufficiently aware of his

predicament to realise that he was not dreaming it.

11. Enthusiasts of coincidences will have noticed the odd similarity of surnames between Anne Langdon at Speyton and Mary Longdon at Youghal.

12. The 1683 pamphlet gives the impression more of a fairy horse than a demonic horse, saying that it "flew out at the window". This reminds us of the fairy horsemen that prefaced Dr Moore's own abduction, appearing in and vanishing from a closed room.

13. Richard Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits* (1691), pp83-87. Baxter's correspondent, Thomas Emlin, was a Nonconformist divine from Dublin, visiting Belfast at the time of the incident. Baxter prefaces the account with: "Having told me this by word of mouth, I desired him to send it, sufficiently attested." The circumstances of old Mrs Lostin's death are also curious, arising from an unseemly dispute between Lemuel Matthews, archdeacon of the county of Down, and Claudius Gilbert, a minister of Belfast. Traditionally, dues were paid by parishioners to the incumbent (Gilbert), but Matthews made a claim on the income, producing a warrant and hiring "servants" to collect it from the households. Charles Lostin's mother had taken exception to the new levy and refused to let the archdeacon's heavies inside. In the ensuing scuffle she was fatally injured and died a few weeks later in October 1685. Nearly five years after Emlin wrote to Baxter, Claudius Gilbert himself sent Baxter his own account, dated 24 August 1691, whose additional details I include in my summary.

14. Lindon was knighted in 1692 and died in 1697. Seymour, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology* (1913), p170.

THANKS: to Peter Costello, Prof Michael Hunter, and Roberto Labanti, and Dr Simon Young, all of who contributed in different ways to the evolution of this study.



TAXING CREDULITY

In an extract from his new book *False Economies*, **SD TUCKER** explores the strange, forgotten world of Gabriel Green, the US contactee and two-time presidential candidate who claimed to get his financial advice from both inner and outer space.

According to HMRC, tax doesn't have to be taxing... but why bother with the very concept at all? Taxes don't exist on any other planet known to mankind. Earthlings were first made aware of this fact due to the innovative work of Gabriel Green (1924–2001), a California-based economic theorist, alien contactee and founder of the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America (AFSCA). 'Honest Gabe' – 'Abe in 1860, Gabe in 1960', ran the Lincoln-referencing slogan on one of his campaign pin-badges – was a two-time US presidential candidate whose political high-point came during the 1962 race for a seat in California's Senate, when, by his own account, he placed second in the State's Democratic Primary with some 171,631 votes, or 8.45 per cent of those cast. That's not too bad a showing, but nonetheless stood as something of a disappointment for Green himself; as a result of his many years of psychic contact with benign humanoid aliens, he genuinely believed that "I have been selected [to become] President by folks from outer space." "With the help of space-men I believe I can carry millions of votes," Green once said, as "hundreds of Space People" were "walking the streets" in disguise, building support for his ticket – but not quite enough support, evidently.

CALIFORNIA STATE OF MIND

Billing himself as 'The Space People's Choice', Green's first failed bid for public office came when he announced himself as a candidate for Congress in 1958, under the auspices of the short-lived Economic Security Party, or 'ESP' for short ('ESP' also stands for 'Extra-Sensory Perception', of course). Two years later, Green was back, running as a candidate during the 1960 presidential election, but that October he withdrew his candidacy, endorsing the eventual winner John F Kennedy instead. However, as both JFK and his brother Robert were clearly "card-carrying members of AFSCA", and because Green himself was in regular telepathic contact with the

AMERICA NEEDS A SPACE AGE PRESIDENT

IF YOU WANT...

- Progress instead of profit.
- Principles instead of personalities.
- Answers to problems instead of only talk about them.
- Results instead of promises.
- Ideas instead of double talk and bullshits.
- Solutions instead of statements.
- Survival instead of annihilation.
- Peace instead of peace.
- Morality instead of moral regeneration.
- Issues instead of issues, issues, and issues.
- Abundance for everyone instead of poverty and wars.
- A better tomorrow instead of no tomorrow.
- Inspired leadership instead of rule by political opportunists.
- Leadership by enlightened direction rather than by popularity polls and pressure groups.

GABRIEL GREEN
YOUR WRITE-IN SPACE-AGE CANDIDATE
(HIS HEART IS WITH THE PEOPLE)

then VOTE for
for INDEPENDENT NON-PARTISAN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

ACT NOW! TOMORROW MAY BE TOO LATE!

ABE IN 1860 GABE IN 1960

LEFT AND BELOW: Publicity materials from Green's 1960 presidential campaign.

encounters with Space Brothers, as the affable aliens of the period were dubbed, he would more often simply allow them to speak through his own body, like a Spiritualist at a séance. A California native, Green was well-placed to take part in the contactee-craze that swept through the Golden State during this first Golden Age of saucerology, that era of now almost legendary men such as George Adamski. AFSCA was no home for more serious-minded UFO researchers, but it proved very popular amongst those at the more unconventional end of the spectrum. As such, press reports about Green were largely light-hearted in nature (i.e. blatant piss-takes). Therefore, the lying fake news media proved of little use to Green when it came to disseminating meaningful details about his manifesto for office; if you wanted those, then you would have to subscribe to his semi-regular fanzine *Thy Kingdom Come*, the world's number one source of UFO-related financial theorising.

BLOWING HIS OWN HORN

Thy Kingdom Come was not what most people might have expected from a UFO magazine. For one thing, the front-page motto of its first issue, dated January 1957, advertised that the publication was "DEDICATED TO THE PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION OF MAN", followed up by a declaration that the main aim of the periodical was: "To help initiate, through political and economic action, the procedures for providing abundance for all." Doing so would "help establish... The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth", thus accounting for the journal's title. Another regular cover-feature was a crude stick-man drawing of someone blowing a horn. This was a reference to a prophecy once made by the famed 16th-century English witch Old Mother Shipton to the effect that "Storms will rage and oceans roar,

"I HAVE BEEN SELECTED BY FOLKS FROM OUTER SPACE"

Kennedy clan, it seems Gabe had a hotline to America's youthful new leader in any case, and so could influence economic policy in that way instead – or so he said. Just like George Washington, Honest Gabe could never tell a lie... could he?

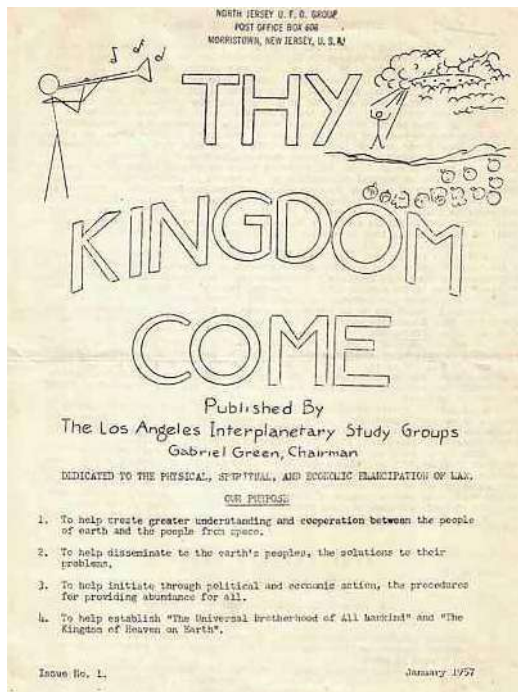
If Gabriel Green was lying to anyone, it was surely only to himself. Obviously a sincere (if deeply deluded) individual, Green was typical of the 1950s contactees in that he was as much a trance-medium as an interlocutor with extraterrestrials, engaging in a number of nascent New Age fads from past-life regression to channelling. Whilst Green claimed a number of actual, physical

when GABRIEL stands on sea and shore; and as he blows his wondrous horn, OLD WORLDS SHALL DIE AND NEW BE BORN." To Green, this was nothing less than a genuine, centuries-old prediction of the key role he was destined to play in history as the man who ushered in a new utopian era of economic abundance upon Earth. In the Bible, the angel Gabriel had announced the birth of Christ to the world; in the pages of *Thy Kingdom Come*, Gabriel Green announced the birth of something far more significant – Prior Choice Economics.

The key issue of *Thy Kingdom Come*, number six, dated December 1957, might have featured a huge image of a flying saucer on the front, as per usual, but its contents bore scant relation to UFOs at all, reading more like a special edition of *The Economist* gone horribly wrong. On the back page was a short biography of the man himself, in which Gabe proudly announced that with his Prior Choice theory he had solved "the problems of people", and compared himself to Abraham Lincoln, 'The Great Emancipator' of America's black slaves. "Some of those who know him," he wrote of himself, grandly using the third-person, "compare his ideals [to those of Lincoln] and draw a correlation between the emancipation of man from physical slavery in the beginning, and the emancipation of man from economic slavery in the end, as both parts of an overall goal to obtain true freedom under God, as was envisaged by the Founding Fathers of this great nation."

MAKE PRIOR CHOICE YOUR FIRST CHOICE

The actual concept of Prior Choice Economics, as described by this latter-day Lincoln, rests upon one core principle, namely that "Everything is... the sum total of all that has taken place before". Applied to finance, this means that a person doesn't actually have any less money in their bank account once they have spent it. Under this wonderful system, explains Green, "one's purchasing power is determined by the total amount [you] have done in your life"; that is to say, the sum total of your paid labours over a lifetime, not by how much cash you have left in the bank since receiving your last paycheck. Say you start your first ever job after leaving education and earn \$1,500 at the end of your first month. Under the current system, you would end up spending most of that, and adding what little remains to your next paycheck of \$1,500. Under a Prior Choice System, however, that original \$1,500 never runs out. Instead, the sum total of the worth of your work is added up by government clerks after each and every monthly payday on a special credit card, so



LEFT: The first issue of Green's bizarre UFO zine, *Thy Kingdom Come*. BELOW: Coverage of Green's presidential bid in the *LA Times*.

that after one month you are worth \$1,500, after two \$3,000, after three \$4,500, and so on forever – so that eventually everyone ends up rich. These 'dollars' are not really dollars at all, though, being better thought of as 'Credit Points', because under Green's scheme, money does not actually exist. Scanning your Prior Choice Card into a cash register does not lead to any money being exchanged, as you keep your total number of Credit Points so far accumulated. Nothing is ever 'spent'; instead, your Prior Choice Card simply indicates the maximum value of any given item in stock you are entitled to, as your lifetime human right, on account of your accumulated service to mankind. As Green put it, Prior Choice is "A NON-MONEY, NON-SPENDING SYSTEM OF ECONOMICS; NOTHING IS EXCHANGED AT THE TIME OF PURCHASE."

The sole point of working, from a selfish personal point of view, thus becomes to get to the front of the queue when it comes to the distribution of new or rare goods. The reason for calling the system 'Prior Choice' is that those who have banked the most Credit Points get prior choice of the scarcest, and therefore most expensive, luxury items. The value of all products for sale, says Green, "is determined by the amount of work done by the last person to which it can be distributed before its supply is exhausted", a value which is constantly declining as more and more of each product is manufactured. Imagine a new model of automobile is produced, and only 100 roll off the production-line in the first month. Only the 100 richest people in the country would be able to afford one, in the sense of being given first choice of purchase. In this case, the manufacturer looks up who that 100th richest person is, and how many Credit Points they have on their Prior Choice Card. Let's say they have 10 million. The price, therefore, would be set at 10 million Credit Points, or 'dollars', for tradition's sake. The next month, another 1,000 autos roll off the assembly line; now, they should be available to the richest 1,100 people in the land as there are 1,100 of the things in total, and nobody is allowed to be greedy and purchase two. The manufacturer looks up who this 1,100th person is and sets the price accordingly. Maybe, by the second month of production, the price of the car will have dropped down to a cool million. By the end of the year, perhaps 10,000 cars have been made, and the price plummeted to \$50,000 per car. If the car becomes so popular that nearly every person in the country starts driving one, then the price will freefall to something like





\$500, meaning almost any adult with a work record can have one upon request. By this point, however, the manufacturer will have designed an even better new model, which will initially be scarce, and begin to be sold at a high price of \$10 million again... and so on, forever.

HORN OF PLENTY

Appliances which penetrate 99.9 per cent of homes, like vacuum cleaners or TVs, will ultimately become dirt-cheap, and truly universal products which everyone must have, such as clothes, food, medicine, utilities and basic housing will cost literally nothing, meaning that anyone ascetically-minded enough to live a truly frugal, non-materialistic life will be able to do so *gratis* until the day they die. A young university student, therefore, who has never done a day's paid toil in his life, would still be able to get as much food as he required even though his Prior Choice Card had a rating of \$0, and would even have a simple home of his own, without having to pay for it. Maybe if he wanted a few extra things like books, to make his life more bearable, he could do a short stint in a factory until he had, say, \$1,000 stored on his Card, enabling him to buy such things easily. If he was happy driving an old-fashioned \$500 car, he need never leave higher-education and get a proper job at all if he didn't want to. This is because, as no money is ever actually changing hands during any transaction, manufacturers, builders and retailers will, under Green's system, be forced by law to offer their products and services to satisfy demand from the population as a whole, not to make a profit. If everyone wants a private jet, for example, then it is the legal obligation of aerospace companies to keep on building them until everyone has one; not, as now, their task to gain profit by building only as many as they can sell to a few lucky billionaires. "THE PURCHASE PRICE OF A PRODUCT FOR SALE IS ENTIRELY INDEPENDENT OF ITS ACTUAL VALUE", wrote Green, in excited capitals, allowing everyone to have one, eventually. Also, taxation would be abolished; money was no longer real, so what would be the point?

Furthermore, due to the coming "automatonic age", machines would bring wonderful new economic services into the world; Green's essay actually includes a substantially accurate prediction of Internet home-shopping services like Amazon (albeit performed via a TV-set). Prior Choice Economics, Green says, is "the greatest story ever told", and he urges readers to spread the word. They should write letters to newspapers, badger their local congressmen, demand propaganda-funds from rich industrialists or, best of all, club together and go to Hollywood to create "A SUPER-MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA" to place before the American public's dazzled eyes. Once his readers have scraped together



enough cash, Green suggests they should use it to "obtain the best performers from the world of entertainment to publicise and dramatise Prior Choice, through beautiful and inspirational music, song, dance, colour, and food for thought!" "YOU CAN TAKE THE ACTION TODAY TO MAKE A BETTER WORLD TOMORROW. START NOW!" was how this loud-tooting trumpet-herald of a new civilisation ended his wild encomium.

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

Issue nine of *Thy Kingdom Come* was a souvenir-programme of AFSCA's 1959 annual convention and contained a detailed account of how it was that Green had become such an ardent proponent of Prior Choice in the first place. He had already made brief admissions that he had not actually invented the theory himself, but now Green provided more details about the true father of the notion, a wandering mystic by the name of Addison Brown (1922–2000; you can read more about him next time). Hailing from Portland, Oregon, Brown had developed his radical idea in 1947, the very same year in which Kenneth Arnold had enjoyed his celebrated UFO/pelican sighting and set off the whole California saucer-craze in the first place. Brown had once been a student of nuclear physics at an unspecified US university, where he had undergone some kind of epiphany/breakdown that led him to abandon his studies and adopt the name of 'John Believer', travelling from State to State preaching about spirituality, Eastern Wisdom and Prior Choice Economics. His subsequent books and pamphlets included such essential-sounding publications as *Talking with Clouds*, *Conquering Death*, *All Problems Solved* and *The Portland Rainbow*.

The way Green tells the story makes it sound as if Brown was, literally, the reincarnation of Christ. Apparently, Brown "wore a beard and had long, wavy hair down to his shoulders" and was the re-embodiment of some great sage of times gone by. He

LEFT: Issue Nine of *Thy Kingdom Come* was a 'souvenir' of the 1959 AFSCA Convention and contained details of how Green had discovered Prior Choice.

"had been called by many different names as he walked the Earth in the past" and had only adopted the pseudonym of John Believer "lest his [true] identity become known before the proper time". Jesus certainly had great timing. The 1960s saw the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln becoming President in 1860 and freeing America's slaves in 1862-3, and Green was sure the centenary of black emancipation would be marked by the blossoming of a parallel programme of pan-racial economic emancipation too. Green never actually makes the claim in so many words, but you get the distinct impression that, just as he believed Addison Brown was the Second Coming of Jesus, so he himself was the reincarnation of Lincoln. As he later admitted in his *AFSCA Information Sheet #3*, a thin newsletter issued during the 1980s, a number of his "Light-Worker" friends on the Californian UFO-scene were really reborn versions of America's Founding Fathers, who were, he said, continually reincarnating "over and over again to raise the quality of life and bring a greater measure of freedom to all mankind." If so, then why should Green not have been the Great Emancipator 2.0, freshly liberated from the prison of the grave?

GREEN PARTY POLITICS

Green paid for a full-page ad in the *LA Mirror-News* of 22 July 1960, setting out his manifesto under the heading "AMERICA NEEDS A SPACE-AGE PRESIDENT", albeit without specifically mentioning alien beings or UFOs anywhere in the main text (although attentive readers would have noticed a cartoon saucer on the ad's mast-head). Instead of playing up the ET-angle, the ad painted Green as the champion of the common man. "HIS HEART IS WITH THE PEOPLE", the breathless spiel gushed. "If you want the World of Tomorrow today and UTOPIA now", then you had to vote for Honest Gabe, whose list of absurd and often meaningless promises had now expanded to include, *inter alia*:

- Progress instead of prattle
- Principles instead of personalities
- Ideas instead of double-talk and ballyhoo
- Solutions instead of stalemates
- Survival instead of annihilation
- Peace instead of pieces
- Morality instead of moral degeneration
- Issues instead of smears, sneers and jeers
- A better tomorrow instead of no tomorrow
- New ideas instead of bombs and bullets
- Everyman a Richman tomorrow
- A passport to Paradise on Earth
- The true Stairway to the Stars instead of missile-fizzles and launching-pad blues



LEFT: Daniel Fry (left) and Gabriel Green, holding UFO-themed newspaper headlines, at the 1959 AFSCA Convention.

"ACT NOW!" the advert screamed. "TOMORROW MAY BE TOO LATE!" And then, after all that effort, in October Green abruptly dropped his candidature, on the grounds that the Space People had made contact with him and let him know that John F Kennedy would do a better job after all – something subsequently confirmed during JFK and Green's many in-depth telepathic conversations with one another. Nonetheless, the campaign had not been in vain. By mentioning space missions and world peace, Green's crusade had helped lay the grounds for Kennedy's subsequent victory and kept his more trigger-happy Right-wing Republican opponent Richard Nixon out of office for the duration of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, thus saving the world. When Green had withdrawn from the race and endorsed Kennedy, that was the final straw which tipped the electoral balance against Tricky Dicky, according to a political scientist from Alpha Centauri named Renton, a four-foot dwarf who greatly resembled Captain Kirk from *Star Trek*. "If it weren't for that Gabriel Green, I'd be President today!" Nixon was allegedly heard to curse, in the manner of a defeated villain from *Scooby Doo*. As both Nixon and Green hailed from the same small California town of Whittier, there is a minor possibility that the crooked future President might actually have heard of his obscure rival, although I sincerely doubt he thought Green had cost him the White House.

KIRBY'S DREAMLAND

Because certain other contactees known to Green had provided him with undeniable proof that Prior Choice Economics was already in use across most of the galaxy (one of his friends claimed to have conducted an interview with Damon-Rel, Prior Choice Business Minister of the hitherto-unknown Planet Korendor, for instance), he knew he couldn't give up on his quest for high office just yet. However, the next stage of his political career took a most unexpected turn, when he teamed up with Kirby J Hensley

(1911–1999), a California-based pseudo-religious con-man who took it upon himself to try and reform the US tax-system. Hensley was the founder in 1962 of the notorious Universal Life Church (ULC), which has been condemned as an 'ordination mill' whose main apparent purpose (whilst under the control of Hensley, at any rate) was to ordain as many people, or indeed animals, as ULC Ministers as it possibly could, at a low, low cost of \$5.00 per certificate – whilst also selling them books, pamphlets and training courses to turn a profit. Hensley intensely disliked the fact that churches and church-leaders in America were to some degree tax-exempt, thinking this was a bigger con trick than any he was involved in; so, he made it his mission to ordain as many ULC Ministers as possible, to starve the US Treasury of tax-income. If he could only persuade enough people to be ordained, then Hensley reckoned the government would have to change its rules and start taxing churches, synagogues and mosques, and those who preached in them, or else go bust. "I just want to raise all the Hell I can, and get all the kooks and what-have-you [classified] as churches," Hensley admitted. "Then they will have to tax them all!"

One such amenable kook, naturally, was Gabriel Green, with whom Hensley joined forces in 1963 to found the 'Universal Party'. Soon, Hensley was, like Green, expressing belief in reincarnation and alien life, and proposing Earth appoint official ambassadors to liaise with the Space Brothers. Hensley ran for President in 1964 and 1968, but fared appallingly with his programme of guaranteeing "civil treatment to visitors from other worlds"; so, in 1972 Gabriel Green campaigned under the Universal Party's auspices to be President instead of Hensley, standing against his old enemy Richard Nixon, with another prominent contactee, Daniel Fry, as his V-P running-mate. The percentage of votes Green gained nationally was so low that it failed to register statistically; he officially gained 0.00 per cent

of that year's support, with a mere 199 crosses next to his name. After this disappointing debacle, Green seems to have split from Hensley completely. The ULC itself still continues today, under the leadership of Hensley's son, André.

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

Following the demoralising failure of his 1972 campaign, Green is often said to have withdrawn into a reclusive retirement in California's Yucca Valley, but this is not quite true. Surprisingly, the mass commercial advent of the Internet around the turn of the millennium facilitated a certain minor revival of Green's ideas and, in the years immediately before his death in 2001, Gabe set up an official AFSCA web-page devoted to spreading news of what he was now calling 'Universal Economics', "because it had been used for aeons of time universally throughout the galaxy." Online, Green patiently explained how the 1997 death of Princess Diana somehow proved that the time was now ripe for the adoption of his plans, which would "ALMOST IMMEDIATELY RESOLVE MOST OF THE PROBLEMS THAT MANKIND IS COMPLAINING ABOUT", even traffic-jams and fiddly tax-returns. According to Green, "when the Universal Economics system is adopted it will make it possible to finance the work of building world-transforming autos that hover over present-day freeways", which will consequently be "turned into beautiful flower-beds". "Wouldn't it be wonderful not to have to pay taxes, or to have to fill out complicated tax reports?" Green asked in August 2000. Almost exactly a year later, on 8 September 2001, he at last achieved such freedom from the oppressive American taxation system – by dying. I wonder whether Green, had he lived a few days more to see the world-shattering events of 11 September 2001, would still have thought a New Age of peace and love was about to dawn upon the Earth? The old temples of American high finance were indeed due to crash and burn, but not, perhaps, in quite the way Gabriel Green and his peacenik pals from outer space had once anticipated.



This article is extracted and condensed from *False Economies: The Strangest, Least Successful and Most Audacious Financial Follies, Plans and Crazes of All Time* by SD Tucker, available from Amberley Publishing, £18.99, ISBN: 9781445672342.

SD TUCKER writes regularly for FT and is the author of such fortan books as *Space Oddities*, *Forgotten Science*, *Great British Eccentrics*, *The Hidden Folk*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and *Paranormal Merseyside*. His latest, *False Economies*, is out now. Please contribute to his finances by buying a copy.

FORUM

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50 years beyond the infinite...

NIGEL WATSON finds that, half a century on, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* is still "the ultimate trip".

"I tried to create a visual experience, one that bypasses verbalised pigeonholing and directly penetrates the subconscious with an emotional and philosophical content."¹

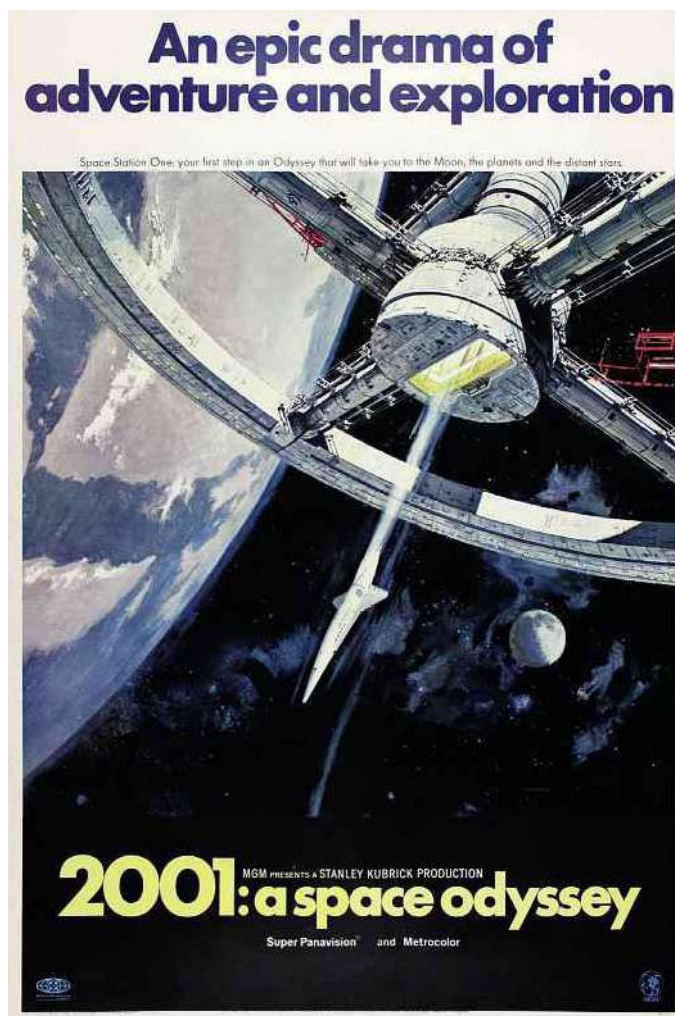
2001: A Space Odyssey is a cinematic masterpiece that fills us with awe at the scale and beauty of outer space, combined with the powerful message that extraterrestrial forces are monitoring and manipulating human destiny.

It was pitched by Stanley Kubrick as a spectacular travelogue that would take the audience on a cinematic journey through outer space. At a time when the Space Race was at its height, Kubrick wanted to offer something that would appear as realistic as possible. To this end, he employed 40 technical advisors and enlisted the aid of leading academic, research and industrial organisations to help construct his vision of space technology in the year 2001.

Kubrick believed that the verisimilitude of the scenes in outer space and the distant past was essential for the audience to take the film seriously, and he wanted to make something that transcended the poor special effects and cheesy storylines that dogged the science fiction genre on the cinema screen.

In April 1964, Kubrick outlined three major themes for the film. One theme would include the landing on and exploration of the Moon and Mars, the central theme was to be about the discovery of intelligent extraterrestrial life and the third theme was to show how humanity would respond to this revelation.²

With these aims in mind he



It was essential for the audience to take the film seriously

soon began to collaborate with science fiction writer Arthur C Clarke to produce a workable film script. Clarke's 1953 novel *Childhood's End* would have provided a great basis for their story, as it deals with the issue of how humanity copes with a peaceful alien invasion by the 'Overlords', but the film rights had already been sold.

This was a shame because as Peter Rogerson notes in his article "Children of Another God" the Overlords represented "...symbols of rational, scientific progress [who] arrive from space to end humanity's squabbles and create a rationalist utopia on Earth. In the closing chapters it is seen that this utopia is sterile; its rationalism a defence against aspects and powers of the human personality which must be hidden until humanity has also gained true wisdom. The release of these powers comes with the birth of a generation of divine children, whose apotheosis marks the end of the

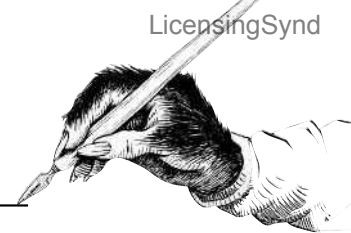
race of mortals."³

Fortunately, they both agreed that Clarke's 1948 short story "The Sentinel" would equally suit their purposes. It is about astronauts exploring the Moon who encounter a pyramid-like structure surrounded by a spherical forcefield. The object seems to have been put there by aliens millions of years ago, and it sends out radio signals into deep space to warn when intelligent life is detected on Earth.

The film ended up having a mysterious black monolith as the alien artefact that triggers human evolution. As in "The Sentinel", Clarke had imagined a black tetrahedron, but when the art department built models using this shape and placed them in their planned settings, they just did not look right and reminded people too much of pyramids. Next, Kubrick thought a transparent cube would work better, but it was not possible to build one large enough. A three-ton rectangular block of lucite was cast, but this did not look right either. From there the art department built the black rectangular slab that is seen in the film. Even after this was ready there were problems with birds soiling the construct, and in close up shots fingerprints easily showed up on the slab.

In their working relationship Kubrick either used or rejected Clarke's text, and as he wrote the spin-off novel Clarke had to virtually guess what the final film would be like. For this reason, there are significant differences between film and book; the main one being that the film is enigmatic and mysterious whereas the novel has a more explanatory framework.

For example, the novel helpfully tells us that when the black monolith appears on Earth during the dawn of human existence, it probes the minds



of the man-apes and subtly conditions their behaviour. We are also told that many other monoliths are carrying out similar operations elsewhere on Earth. Interestingly, the monolith in the novel radiates “spinning wheels of light” and makes a drumming sound, which is reminiscent of Ezekiel’s biblical vision of a flying chariot.⁴

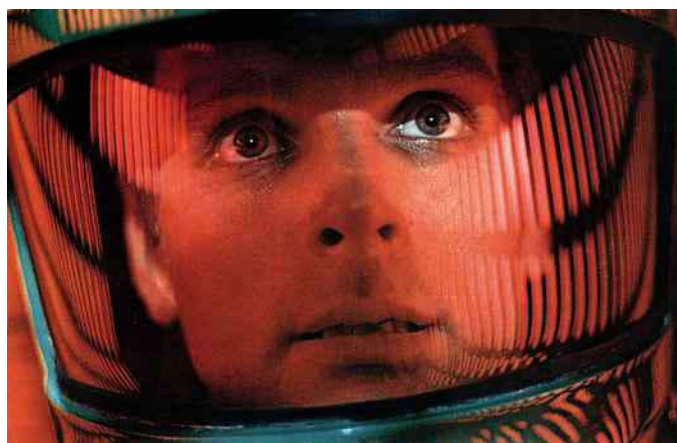
Kubrick did make a 10-minute prologue, which gave some background to scientific theories of evolution, biology, astronomy and alien contact, but this was dropped after one screening.⁵ Frederick Ordway III, a scientific and technical consultant to Kubrick, complained that the opening sequences should have retained the narration that Clarke had written for them, so the audience would know exactly what was going on.⁶

Instead of lots of factual details expressed through dialogue or voice-overs, Kubrick uses music, composition, colour, editing, camera movement, lighting and special effects to give the viewer a powerful sense of the enormity of space, time and the lurking presence of alien forces beyond our comprehension.

2001 shows spacecraft whirling gracefully to the music of Johann Strauss II’s *The Blue Danube* and is contrasted with Gyorgy Ligeti’s discordant electronic music. Ligeti’s *Requiem* is used in conjunction with appearances of the monolith, and his *Atmospheres* is used during the stargate sequence to highlight that we are far from the realms of normal human experience and knowledge.

At each stage of human transformation Richard Strauss’s majestic tone poem *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is used, with its connotations of Nietzsche’s concept of the New Superman and the elimination of the old gods.

In the novel,



Clarke is even able to supply the sense of the strangeness of the original monolith’s arrival when he states that for the first time on Earth a new sound was made: “It was the clank of metal upon stone.”⁷

The dissonance caused by the mystery forces associated with the arrival of the monolith forces the viewer to seek the solution and resolution to this problem. In most films and books that feature a mystery, all the answers are usually supplied in the last chapter. *2001* does not offer any answers – only questions about our place in the Universe. Many people feel cheated by this, but it is hardly fair to expect Kubrick or Clarke to explain the ultimate secrets of human existence.

Writing in *Sight and Sound* magazine⁸ Mel McKee compares much of the film’s imagery with that used in CS Lewis’s ‘Ransom Trilogy’ novels.⁹ These similarities are the breaking of silence between Earth and other life forms in the Universe, the restriction of man’s travel into space, the use of unusual celestial conjunctions, lights and colours, the description of a house at the end of a hole in space, and the concluding transformation of man into a disembodied spirit. Lewis’s aim was to highlight man’s alienation from God and

the possible purification of his soul. Clarke and Kubrick are

more concerned with how our scientific ‘progress’, triggered by alien forces, helps humanity overcome the limitations of the physical body and our irrational, immature, self-destructive modes of thinking.

The concept of aliens being integral to our evolution and possibly our saviours at a time when nuclear warfare could wipe us out, is felt in numerous science fiction films of the 1950s, most notably Robert Wise’s 1951 classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*; and, of course, during the same period similar issues inspired the contactee movement and the theories of numerous early UFO researchers.

In an interview with *Playboy* magazine, Kubrick shows he has studied the subject of UFOs in some detail and acknowledges that: “The evidence proves they’re up there, but it gives us very little clue as to what they are.” He even thinks it is “possible that all the governments in the world really do take UFOs seriously and perhaps are already engaging in secret study projects to determine their origin, nature and intentions. If so, they may not be disclosing their findings for fear that the public would be alarmed.”

He goes on to say: “I’m really fascinated by UFOs and I only regret that this field of investigation has to a considerable extent been preempted by a crackpot fringe that claims to have soared to Mars on flying saucers piloted by three-foot-tall green

LEFT: Keir Dullea in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. BELOW: Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C Clarke on the set.

humanoids with pointy heads. That kind of kook approach makes it very easy to dismiss the whole phenomenon, which we do at our own risk.”

Far from the popular image of little green men, the unseen alien presence in *2001* is ancient, God-like and inscrutable. It very much reflects the hope of many of Clarke’s stories that humankind will evolve beyond its present state, and in Kubrick’s *2001* we are left to believe that the astronaut Bowman has been reborn and that the film’s odyssey is a voyage to spiritual and metaphysical insight.

As with the UFO mystery itself, there are no clear-cut answers in *2001*, and even after 50 years it still remains (as the film’s publicity had it) “the ultimate trip” for anyone who has an interest in our place in the Universe and the possibility that we are not alone.

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◆ NIGEL WATSON is a veteran UFO researcher and author of numerous books, including *UFOs of the First World War: Phantom Airships, Balloons, Aircraft and Other Mysterious Aerial Phenomena* (2015).



THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

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33. WHAT HAVE THE GODS EVER DONE FOR US?

The traditional Seven Wonders of the World were first listed by Philo of Byzantium in 250 BC. Of those, six have disappeared or fallen into ruin, and now only the pyramids of Giza are still standing, in their battered fashion. Naturally, there has been no lack of attempts to update the list, and no lack of squabbling over what it should include. In our view such a catalogue should feature Erich von Däniken (below), a monumental figure in so many ways, even if few of them are good. Not only is he still alive and peddling his curious ideas in books, on cable TV and in the occasional movie: since 1968, when *Chariots of the Gods?* appeared, he has sold 63 million copies of his remarkable volumes, despite their being debunked regularly and thoroughly in the last half-century. (That figure is his own claim, by the way; given his record you're not obliged to believe it.) So, despite all that criticism, there would seem to be an awful lot of people who persist in believing him or (less likely) who buy the stuff just to see what all the fuss is all about. But here we are not recommending you join that merry throng; rather, we're taking a look at a couple of early debunking exercises, which tell you nearly all you need to know about von Däniken's approach, his wilful inaccuracies, and his cavalier way with history and archaeology as they are usually conceived.

Surely by now everyone knows von Däniken's essential thesis. Revision notes: millennia ago, 'advanced beings' descended to Earth in spaceships, and put it about a bit among the apes (ugh – rather than us), thus boosting or directing the evolution of primates into the human race; and they came back from time to time to help build the aforesaid pyramids, donate a massive condenser, *alias* the Ark of the Covenant, to the Hebrews, make drawings on the Nazca plain, put the famous statues of Easter Island in place (plus their hats), and so forth. That they came from the sky and performed miracles naturally inspired people to regard them as gods, and therefore the gods of ancient religious writings are, in fact, powerful beings from outer space, possessed of magic technology. It's an entertaining wheeze. Shame about its scientific foundations though (not that von Däniken ever cites a source). And why didn't we know about all this before Erich came along? Scientists, historians and archaeologists all kept their lips zipped with superglue. As they always do.

One aspect – we may as well get it over with – of the von Däniken approach, which neither of our authors addresses, is its implicit racism. Essentially von Däniken reckons that the Sumerians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Indians, Incas, *et al.* of

yore were too obtuse and unimaginative to have done what they did without help from anti-gravity devices and the like. As anthropologist Prof. John T Omohundro puts it, von Däniken "implies that up until the last thousand years or so the world was filled with primitives, heathens, savages, dummies. Their intelligence matched their simple technologies; their languages were simple, their cultures were primitive, they were brutes. If they seem to have come up with something quite fantastic by our standards, someone smarter than them must have given it to them. They then proceeded to garble it up in their ingenuousness; they certainly didn't do those things for the same reason that we would have."

But really von Däniken insults not just ancient and exotic cultures: his approach insults all humanity's capacity for wit, imagination, and engineering skill. To take his 'argument' to its logical conclusion, it's clear that Newton and Einstein and other profoundly original scientists – not to mention Homer, Phidias, Shakespeare, Beethoven and Rembrandt, among others – were aliens or had aliens whisper in their ears, and the Qur'an was dictated to Mohammad by a space brother. Rather inconsistently,

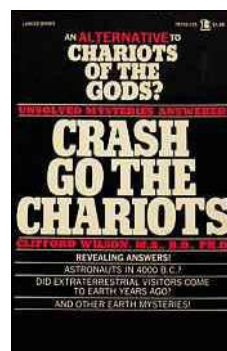
even bizarrely, von Däniken doesn't argue that Jesus of Nazareth was an extraterrestrial, although the evidence for this is as good as any other of his claims.

Clifford Wilson (1923–2012) doesn't dwell on the anomaly, but he has plenty to be cross about already. Wilson was a professor of education, sometime director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology, a PhD in psycholinguistics, and committed Christian verging on the fundamentalist; so when *Chariots of the Gods?* proposed that God was a spaceman, he was intensely annoyed. And doubly so. Von Däniken's caricature of archaeology as a monolithic collection of ideas "set in concrete" irritated him as a professional, and he spends several pages explaining how archaeologists actually work, confer, and even change their minds in the face of evidence. His Christian dedication doesn't mar his demolitions of von Däniken's daftnesses: indeed, it remains largely implicit until the final paragraphs of his book. And one doesn't have to

accept Wilson's belief in a one true God and Christ the Redeemer to see the strength of his arguments. It's a short volume (only 114 pages of main text), and consequently Wilson's style can be somewhat telegraphic, presuming a knowledge of both *Chariots of the Gods?* and biblical texts that are probably outwith the grasp of modern secular readers. Not to worry. He lucidly and comprehensively trounces von Däniken on many

salient points, some of which we can enjoy here.

One of von Däniken's more egregious errors was to claim that the Hebrew prophet Enoch "disappeared for ever in a fiery heavenly chariot." Except he didn't. "This adds considerably to the Bible account," remarks Wilson drily, "which simply says, 'And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.'" Von Däniken is plainly confusing Enoch with Elijah, (II Kings, 2:11): "And it came to pass, as they [Elijah and his protégé Elisha] still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses



of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” One of the better-known events of the Hebrew Bible, one might have thought. This kind of error does make one wonder if he had any remotely reliable sources at all: perhaps not even a Bible to peer into occasionally?

Wilson has much fun with von Däniken’s bright idea that the Ark of the Covenant was a huge electrical condenser, hauling in an expert to uncover the nonsense within with some thoroughness. Apart from the explicitness of God’s instructions as to how the Ark was to be constructed and what it should contain, none of which might a condenser make, electronics technician Geoff Peers, Wilson’s expert advisor, makes the killer point: “[A] condenser is simply a storage place of electricity. Where did Moses plug in for power in the first place?” Von Däniken also “seems to remember” (“without actually consulting Exodus”, perhaps because he didn’t have a copy) that the Ark spat sparks whenever Moses communed with God in its presence. No such mention in the Bible.

Possibly even lazier is von Däniken’s treatment of the Easter Island statues which, among other things, he says could not have been constructed by people, given the island’s tiny population, difficulties of transportation, and the “steel-hard” (it’s not) volcanic rock from which the statues were made. Strangely, axes and adzes of harder rock lie all about the relevant quarry. No less than 14 years before von Däniken’s book appeared, Thor Heyerdahl (of *Kon Tiki* fame) had published his own adventure in experimental archaeology, and demonstrated how the statues were cut, transported, and put into place by a virtual handful of people. Which conveniently passed von Däniken by as he pursued his notion that humans are incapable of doing what humans do. From here Wilson makes the natural leap to discussing why von Däniken is comprehensively mistaken (not to say tendentiously misleading) as to how the Egyptian pyramids were built.

One of von Däniken’s rashest claims concerns Elephant Island, washed by the waters of the Nile. Our radical reviser of all things ancient and historical maintains that its name is surely proof that someone capable of flight “at a great height” must have named it, since it’s shaped like an elephant. Er, well, actually, no it isn’t, Wilson points out. It is really quite extraordinary that von Däniken included such an easily checkable non-fact, not to say fib, in his ‘thesis’.

In *Guardians of the Universe?* Ronald



LEFT: The Easter Island heads, according to von Däniken, could only have been constructed with ET help.

“IF ONE READS
PROFITABLY,
ONE WOULD
REALISE HOW
MUCH STUPID
STUFF THE
VULGAR HERD
IS CONTENT
TO SWALLOW
EVERY DAY.”

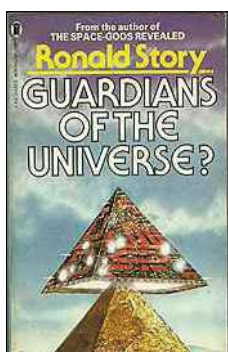
Voltaire

Story obligingly prints not one but two maps of the island to demonstrate the point. Three years earlier he had published *The Space Gods Revealed*, but this is the more detailed book and ranges further than *Chariots of the Gods?* Story is excellent

in laying out the historical-psychosocial context in which von Däniken’s first book enjoyed such phenomenal sales. He also offers a useful survey of von Däniken’s predecessors in the ‘ancient-astronaut’ school, which also works as a guide to von Däniken’s unacknowledged pseudoscientific sources. Then he gets down to business.

Naturally Story covers much the same ground as Wilson did earlier, but his killer sentences arrive quite early

on: “Von Däniken seems to think that in order for an intelligent race to originate, they need outside help. But if that is the case, how do we account for the helpers, and *their* helpers, and so on *ad infinitum*. Plugging in a *deus ex machina* only begs the question.” (Here for once is a correct use of the phrase.) The answer to Story’s



rhetorical enquiry is surely that von Däniken’s ‘divine’ spacemen must in fact *be* gods, or emissaries of the one God, not mere technological superstars and adroit managers of DNA and an enormous programme of cosmic bonking. Von Däniken can no more accept that idea than can Story. But Story has real science and Occam’s Razor, which he most skilfully wields, on his side.

So Story sails happily along the lines on the Nazca plain, knocking down von Däniken’s preachings about a spaceport one by one. The fundamental objections are that if the ‘gods’ had landed there once, they ought, as technological miracle-workers, have found it none too difficult to find their way back again; and if they *had* landed there again, how come the lines survived (if they used jets or rockets) or why, if they had some kind of gliding shuttle, are there no tyre tracks on the main runway? A shuttle would still make a mess taking off for the mothership, too. Such problems are, of course, obviated if one recalls that von Däniken’s gods had anti-gravity devices (we know ‘cause he says so). And what were all those giant spiders, birds, fish, jaguars, and monkeys, etched into the earth for? Truth is, no one really knows, although respectable academics have offered some respectable speculations based on what’s known of the Nazca and nearby cultures. Not good enough for von Däniken, but then neither is Occam’s Razor.

Story does a good thorough job on two supposed ancient atomic blasts, one at Sodom and Gomorrah – somehow von Däniken figured that there was a dump of nuclear fuel there that the aliens needed to dispose of, ho hum – and the other, more predictably, at Tunguska in 1908. His dissertation on Sodom and Gomorrah is a good entertaining read, although he doesn’t mention Wilson’s intriguing explanation of how Lot’s wife turned into a pillar of salt. His dissection of the Tunguska event (yes, it was a comet) is perhaps the most concise, detailed and useful account in the public prints.

Both Wilson and Story can be a bit po-faced about von Däniken’s relentless speculations. But the upshot is that they arm you with the facts, and turn von Däniken into one of the most fertile sources of 20th-century comedy. And they save you having to read the dire original.

Clifford Wilson, *Crash Go the Chariots*, Lancer 1972

Ronald Story, *Guardians of the Universe?*, New English Library 1980

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The prophet as a lucid dreamer

The case of Lucrecia de León, a 16th century Spanish teenager whose dreams (or were they revelations?) were regarded as seditious, suggests possible new directions for dream research

Lucrecia the Dreamer

Prophecy, Cognitive Science, and the Spanish Inquisition

Kelly Bulkeley

Stanford University Press 2018

Pb, 256pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$22.95, ISBN 9781503603868

By splendid coincidence, I was trawling for material for another project two days before writing this and happened upon 'Distant Wonders: The Strange and the Marvellous between Mughal India and Habsburg Iberia in the Early Seventeenth Century' (2007) by that great sinologist Robert Campany. In it, he mentions the Mughal emperor Jahangir telling a party of Spanish missionaries in 1608 "about a woman at court who suffered 'from amazing dreams'." "A sort of Muslim version," notes Campany, "of the celebrated Lucrecia de León." I did not know the story of this oneiric woman, but recognised her name from the title of the book that lay atop my review heap.

People who dream vivid, coherent, portentous dreams are not unusual, but when their content concerns treasonous plots against the king and takes place in late 16th century Spain, the dreamer is in legal and religious peril. When that dreamer is a teenaged girl, she is vulnerable. When she faces interrogation by the Inquisition, her fate is almost certain. Yet this girl survived years of torture and imprisonment (during which she had a child). Her story is so remarkable that it deserved to be told on the big screen.

Lucrecia was the intelligent but "semi-literate" daughter of a Madrid family. Her father, a banking lawyer, was so fearful that his daughter's dreams

would attract the 'wrong' kind of attention that he threatened to kill her if she showed signs of believing them. (At the time, other 'prophets', such as Piedrola, the 'soldier-prophet', who openly preached a republican revolution, were stirring public discontent with royal rule.) Lucrecia's mother, however, revelled in the growing cultish adoration that promoted the notion that her daughter's dreams were divinely inspired, and the steady stream of high-born suitors attracted by Lucrecia's fame.

The onset of these intense dreams coincided with her puberty, but the affair became serious in 1587, when she was 19, when two priests began daily records of her dreams and allowed them to be widely circulated. One of the first – in fact the *main* cause of Lucrecia's fame – was her dreaming of the loss of the Armada sent to England. Others portrayed King Phillip II as evil or even dead, a bloodthirsty Elizabeth of England disembowelling a lamb, and a dragon laying waste to the *calle*s of Madrid. Most were variations of apocalyptic doom for the Spanish empire, the end of the monarchy and the rise of a new, stronger Spain triumphing over Protestants, Moors and other enemies. By 1588, there were some 400 such dreams and Lucrecia was a popular 'act', invited to upper-class soirées to recite her visions. Opinion was divided: were they dreams or revelatory visions?

She was arrested in 1590 and endured several periods of interrogation (including waterboarding) over the following five years. If her visions were truly prophetic, and she was proven to be complicit in bringing about the events, the

"Lucrecia trained herself to go further, developing some control over the act of dreaming"

Inquisition would have the proof of treason that the Royal court had tasked them with finding. Lucrecia, however, stuck to her father's advice and maintained that her dreams were 'just' dreams, and that she had no control over how they were interpreted and used. In July 1595, her case was judged *en diferencias*, an admission that a satisfactory conclusion could not be reached. The fact that most of her 'prophecies' never came about worked in her favour. Nevertheless, the imagery, if not the message, of most of her dreams was regarded as seditious, so she was sentenced to 100 lashes "lightly delivered", two years in a convent and a lifetime's exile from Madrid.

Besides this intriguing story, engagingly told, Kelly Bulkeley, a psychologist of religion, dissects more than 30 of Lucrecia's dreams, reconstructed in detail from both the popular printings and the original records of her interrogation and imprisonment. Then, based upon his experience in the cognitive sciences as director of the Internet-based Sleep and Dream Database, he studies their elements, patterns and interpretations, making allowances for the historical and sociological dynamics of her time and place. Bulkeley cites three fellow historians of Lucrecia's life, all of whom agreed that her

dreams provided an effective vehicle for "expressing bold political ideas that would otherwise be forbidden from a young uneducated woman of her modest social class".

To understand the relationship between dreams and religion, he argues, we have to realise the difference between "the fabricated fictions from a waking state" and "the creative products of a mind during sleep". This is the meat and potatoes of modern sleep and dream scientists. Bulkeley is aware of the problems of the historical reliability of period documentation and of Lucrecia's own accounts, given they were extracted under the threat and use of torture. Nor does he shrink from attempting to answer the Inquisition's own question about the difference between a dream and a "true revelation".

While Lucrecia's personal story becomes the framework on which the faultlines of Spanish society are displayed, Bulkeley sees a bigger picture. Lucrecia had a special psychological talent for realistic and symbolic

dreaming. There is evidence that she trained herself to go further, not only improving the power and duration of her dreams but also developing some control over the act of dreaming. This is important because every culture has stories of the transformative power of intense dreams. It is this last prospect that really excited the author and he leaves us with the picture of a neglected talent – one he calls "future oriented dreaming" – that may, in future, be cultivated and put to use in ways we have yet to fully understand.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★



Damned to roam forever

How a metaphor for enslavement transmuted – courtesy of a dollop of sensationalism – into a reflection of more generalised social anxieties

Undead Uprising

Haiti, Horror and the Zombie Complex

John Cussans

Strange Attractor Press 2017

Pb, 404pp, illus, bib, ind, £16.89, ISBN 9781907222474

John Cussans's *Undead Uprising: Haiti, Horror and the Zombie Complex* is a dense yet readable study of the sociological and cultural Haitian origins of the zombie.

The 'zombi' first appeared on the French-ruled island (then Saint-Domingue) in the 17th and 18th centuries, when African slaves laboured on its sugar plantations; nearly half died within a few years of their arrival. They believed that death would transport their souls back to Africa; those who committed suicide would, however, eternally roam the plantations.

Even the grave offered no escape; the zombie remained enslaved. The Haitian zombie was, therefore, initially a folkloric expression of the relentless horror of the slaves' existence: they were literally the walking dead.

Following the 1804 Haitian revolution, which essentially ended French colonialism there, the zombie became more fantastically entrenched in the island's folklore. It was eventually appropriated by the religion of Vodou (or Voodoo). Many of its practitioners believed that zombies were corpses magically reanimated by the *bokor*, sorcerers of the shamanistic Vodou priesthood, who used them as cheap labour – much as their French colonialist antecedents had done – or to commit evil acts. This iteration of the zombie was informed by the all-too-recent legacy of slavery which, along with Vodou, continues to haunt Haiti, politically and socially.

By the early 20th century, the romanticism of the island's folklore attracted attention from the First World, and the appropriation of the zombie began. Journalist and travel writer William Seabrook wrote *The Magic Island* (1927), one of the first (and still most famous) studies of Haiti and its folklore. Cussans unpacks the degree to which Seabrook's work and Wade Davis's 'anthropological', *Indiana Jones*-tinged *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987), are weighted with cultural baggage and sensationalism.

Following the publication of Seabrook's work, Hollywood, then at the apex of its 'monster' exploitation (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein* etc), introduced its depiction of the zombie. This had been anticipated by Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), whose hypnotist and somnambulist were stand-ins for the *bokor* and the reanimated corpse.

The zombie made its first proper appearance in the Bela Lugosi vehicle *The White Zombie* (1932), based in part on Seabrook's travelogue. It preserved the Haitian plantation setting, as did most films in the zombie genre until George A Romero's groundbreaking *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Its undead zombies, now referred to as 'ghouls', are cannibalistic cadavers whose mysterious reanimation is probably – though not definitively – the result of radioactive contamination from a Venus space probe re-entering Earth's atmosphere.

Released from its cultural trappings, the modernised zombie becomes more elaborately psychological and thus metaphorically fungible. It is a metaphor for everything from a reflection of post-war societal changes (civil rights,

anti-Vietnam), to a critique of late capitalist greed and exploitation, and of consumerist and cultural conformity. It is a meditation on post-humanism, or an illustration of fears concerning plagues and environmental contamination or biological and nuclear warfare.

In this sense, Romero's zombies are modern cinema's most potent monstrous stand-in, certainly more narratively fertile than the more conventional cinema monsters. The "zombie apocalypse" birthed by Romero's films has found a real-world analogue in recent outbreaks of individuals committing cannibalistic acts while under the influence of stimulants or, more troublingly, for no particular reason.

Where Cussans's *Undead Uprising* shines is where he traces this current, generalised metaphor for the zombie back to its Saint-Domingue roots, to the deplorable treatment of Haitian slaves, who faced subjugation, imprisonment, and death.

Once a metaphor for actual enslavement and dehumanisation, this new and culturally significant zombie is now a representation of forces that remain out of our control, which threaten every man, woman, and child, regardless of their freedom or lack thereof.

The zombie mythos, Cussans argues, provides fascinating suggestions concerning the insidiousness of the current systems in which we find ourselves, whose restrictions are often altogether less physical than those faced by Haitian slaves.

It leaves us with a vague sense of confinement and possession by forces we cannot begin to understand, yet whose outlines we, in our inescapable mortality, intuitively perceive.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★★

Science Fiction

A Literary History

Ed: Roger Luckhurst

British Library 2017

Hb, 256pp, illus, refs, ind, £20.00 ISBN 9780712356923

Two hundred years ago, Mary Shelley published, arguably, the first science fiction novel: *Frankenstein* – although, The British Library's *Science Fiction: A Literary History* notes, there are several other claimants. The book offers a whistle-stop tour of the development of this now ubiquitous genre, which has moved from the mainstream (such as Wells and Verne) to the counterculture (for example, *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Bug Jack Barron*) and back (including Roth's and Auster's alternative histories).

'Literary' SF has never been about the future, alternative histories or different realities. It's been about isolating, analysing and offering new insights into contemporary society, psychology or culture. Most obviously, technology's impact is a consistent theme. For example, the French author Albert Robida's 1882 novel *The Twentieth Century* seems a "cross between *The Jetsons* and the novels of Charles Dickens".

Set in 1952, Robida uses a job-hunting young woman to satirise various professions – business, law, journalism and so on – with insight and humour. He envisages homes with electric heat and light, large interactive TVs ('telephonoscopes') and piped-in gourmet food and wine. (*The Twentieth Century* is one of several books that *Science Fiction: A Literary History* inspired me to add to my 'must read' list or re-read pile.) More recently, SF writers considered, for instance, the impact of AI, climate change and the status of animal life.

Indeed, examining contentious issues inside an SF 'frame' allows writers a freedom sometimes denied to those working in other genres. After World War II, to take just one example (there are countless others), SF writers in the USA used the genre's conventions "for political allegory and satire". As Malisa Kurtz's essay notes, "Because of its status as a relatively marginal pulp genre, SF was one of the few spaces where stories [...] were free to pursue critiques of



McCarthyism and the political conservatism of the US”.

The contributors to *Science Fiction: A Literary History* are academics. So, they take a serious look at serious issues, addressed by serious writers. Luckhurst notes that the first writers to document SF history in the 1960s – such as Aldiss, Amis and Suvin – separated “worthies [of the genre] from the awful anonymous mass”. In many ways this book continues this tradition.

So *Science Fiction: A Literary History* doesn't really engage with the more playful end of SF: the ‘dinosaurs on a spaceship’ (to jump media for a moment) stories that make you smile in wonder even if your intellect knows it's a bit silly. Nevertheless, Luckhurst had to draw the boundaries somewhere and the book is thematically, narratively and stylistically consistent without overpowering the contributors' individual voices. In other words, *Science Fiction: A Literary History* is very well edited.

Luckhurst says that the authors “aspired to map some of the important routes through the labyrinthine history of this extraordinary, protean and constantly shifting genre”. And, in general, they succeed. They also provide useful lists of additional reading, which will help act as signposts along the way. If you're new to the genre, if you feel you've only skimmed the surface, or you want to know more, *Science Fiction: A Literary History* is an excellent launch pad.

Mark Greener

★★★★★

Laughing Shall I Die

Lives and Deaths of the Great Vikings

Tom Shippey

Reaktion Books 2018

Hb, 368pp, illus, plates, maps, bib, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9781780239095

Once seen as bloodthirsty raiders and marauders, the Vikings underwent something of a reanalysis by archaeologists and historians in the latter half of the 20th century. New research focused on the lives of ordinary

people during the Viking age, as well as the Scandinavian impact on Britain's economy and culture. This corrective to the accepted view resulted in what could arguably be called the modern consensus view of the Vikings, one that downplays the invasions and atrocities in favour of examining other aspects of the period.

Tom Shippey's *Laughing Shall I Die* takes the opposite tack, focusing on the role of the Vikings properly so-called – not using the term as a generic one for the peoples of early mediaeval Scandinavia, but examining the activities of the raiders and pirates it originally referred to. Using mostly textual sources, Shippey attempts to identify a distinctive Viking mindset, one that could explain both the military success of Scandinavian raiders but also their contemporary reputation for brutality and cruelty.

Over the course of the book, Shippey uses examples from throughout the Viking period to establish a view of the warlike aspects of Viking culture: a philosophy of *drengskapr* that emphasised self-control, careless resistance to hardship, cunning and brutality. Shippey establishes this position with a survey of sources including external historical sources, Icelandic sagas, Old Norse poetry and archaeology. He includes detailed analyses of the political and military careers of Viking leaders, from historical figures like Harald Hardrada to semi-legendary characters like Ragnar Lothbrok.

As a sprawling guide to Viking history, *Laughing Shall I Die* makes compelling reading. Shippey's wide-ranging survey of the

literature is lucid and engaging, presenting his view in a way that's revealing even for readers already familiar with the subject material, and accessible for those who aren't. However, although this book provides a fascinating look at the culture of Old Norse society (or perhaps Old Norse literature), it doesn't necessarily answer the question Shippey sets himself early on: “What gave [the Vikings] their edge?”

Shippey seems to imply that it was the philosophy of *drengskapr*, not some technical or logistical advantage, that allowed Viking armies to defeat Anglo-Saxon

and Frankish forces that were, in theory, superior. This philosophy injured the Vikings to hardship, kept their morale high, and taught them that defeat was an opportunity to demonstrate heroic resolve and insouciance rather than a reason to give up. But by the end, Shippey doesn't seem confident enough in this position to state it explicitly – the conclusion merely focuses on demonstrating that this Viking mindset existed rather than connecting it to the victories of the Vikings in the early Middle Ages. One thing that feels missing from Shippey's discussion of *drengskapr* is the extent to which comparable heroic ideologies existed in the cultures resisting Viking invasions. For instance, Shippey discusses the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon* as an example of a battle between Anglo-Saxon and Viking forces. This poem contains expressions of warriors' resolve in the face of an impossible struggle that seem to resemble the Viking viewpoint Shippey describes, and it's not hard to think of other examples from British and Continental literature. Was the Viking ethos really unique among early mediaeval European cultures – and if it wasn't, how could it have given the Vikings their ‘edge’?

Although it would have been nice to see Shippey engage with this question, there's a lot to like in this vibrant discussion of a worldview. The author's voice is memorable and idiosyncratic, making this an easy and enjoyable read despite its scholarship. *Laughing Shall I Die* is an informative and entertaining read for anyone interested in the Viking age, even if its conclusion doesn't quite match its ambitious beginning.

James Holloway

★★★★★

Out There

The Transcendent Life and Art of Burt Shonberg

Spencer Kansa

Mandrake of Oxford 2017

Pb, 255pp, illus, ind, £30.00, ISBN 9781906958794216

During the 1950s, Los Angeles artist Burt Shonberg's murals decorated the interiors of coffeehouses and clubs on the

Sunset Strip. His own Café Frankenstein became a popular hangout for Laguna Beach's artistic and beatnik community. His colour-rich, surrealist-influenced art also featured on album covers, *Fantastic* magazine, and on screen – his commissioned paintings appear in Roger Corman's *Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Premature Burial*.

But Shonberg, successful artist and club owner, was also a practising occultist who'd undergone a dramatic change after meeting the legendary Marjorie Cameron. A powerful and charismatic practitioner of Aleister Crowley's magick, the older, more experienced Cameron turned Shonberg on to peyote and sex magick. Their joint fascination with extra-terrestrials saw them journey out to the Mojave Desert, where they awaited the UFOs which, they believed, were to land and then carry them away into space. Shonberg was also an enthusiastic exponent of Gurdjieff's teachings; all these esoteric beliefs began to be reflected in his art.

In 1960, he participated in Dr Oscar Janiger's then groundbreaking study of the effects of LSD on the creative process. LSD did influence Shonberg's painting style; in fact, his name was to

become synonymous with psychedelic art. Shonberg's prodigious drug intake over the years was to lead to an estrangement from everyday reality such that he came to believe

himself an “intergalactic agent” from the fourth dimension.

Despite his thorough involvement in LA's underground scene, the patriotic Shonberg vociferously declared his support for US involvement in Vietnam, and expressed enormous pride at the 1969 moon landing. An intriguing, contrarian character, Shonberg was one of several unusual, creative types on the Laurel Canyon set, of which this well-illustrated book (containing numerous colour and black & white reproductions of his work) is a social history as well as a biography.

Chris Josiffe

★★★★★



Tut, you beauty

Distinguished Egyptologists are contributors, but the book's glory is its striking photography

Tut

The Journey Through the Underworld

Sandro Vannini in collaboration with Mohamed Megahed

Taschen 2018

Hb, 447pp, illus (and how), £50.00, ISBN 9783836571463

This is a magnificent doorstep of a book, the kind of production for which publisher Taschen is celebrated. It's almost a contemporary equivalent of those Books of Hours commissioned by mediæval monarchs, so few of which survive. It measures 35cm by 25.5cm, and is 4.5cm thick – not something to read in bed. It's a stunning feast for the eyes, presenting the art and artifice of that far-off age as if for the first time in all its luscious tones, playful patterns and often impressionist style. The brief goes way beyond the actual grave goods from Tut's pokey tomb, creating an intricate picture of how ancient Egyptian people viewed the perilous journey to paradise, a utopian Egypt that could only be entered following the final judgment.

New technology has enabled Sandro Vannini, using a multi-shot technique, to capture murals and artefacts in high definition and unprecedented detail. As the acclaimed photographer put it: "I have always

cultivated the illusion of taking away a piece of the soul of ancient Egypt with my photos, to have it travel elsewhere and to preserve it for ever." Just as well, as some of the objects depicted here were damaged or even destroyed in the 2011 uprising.

Chapters by nine distinguished Egyptologists cover Death and Mummification, Rituals and Offerings, The Funeral, Osiris and the Judgment, The Ancient Egyptian Sky, the Journey in the Afterlife, and Eternal Life in Paradise.

Last year, Egyptologist Nicholas Reeves announced – after analysis of high-definition laser scans by Factum Arte – that concealed doorways in Tutankhamun's tomb indicated a hidden chamber or chambers, possibly containing the mummy of Kia, Tut's biological mother, or even of Nefertiti, wife of his father Akhenaten [FT336:4]. However, Egypt's antiquities ministry announced on 6 May that new ground-penetrating radar scans by an Italian team have provided conclusive

evidence that there are no undiscovered rooms in the tomb after all. So there is no longer the possibility of a further cache of grave goods to eclipse those of the boy king.

Edward Young

★★★★★



The Ashtray

(Or the Man Who Denied Reality)

Errol Morris

University of Chicago Press 2018

Pb, 208pp, index, bib, figs, plates, £22.50, ISBN 9780226922683

What is it about philosophers? A more fissiparous bunch it would be hard to find: if they aren't threatening each other with pokers, they are flinging ashtrays at each other's heads. The ashtray, in this case, was flung by noted philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn at the head of his graduate student Errol Morris. Needless to say, they did not get on, and this is no small part of the reason why Morris these days is best known as a documentary film-maker (*Thin Blue Line*, *Fog of War*) rather than as a philosopher.

Revenge, it is said, is a dish best served cold, and this is both Morris's revenge on Kuhn, and served very cold indeed, Kuhn himself having been comfortably in the ground for 20 years and more.

Kuhn's 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is a seminal work in the philosophy of science and was a key text when I taught the history of science. For Kuhn, science does not proceed as a smooth accumulation of knowledge; instead, it proceeds in fits and starts as the entire consensus of the scientific community is periodically overturned and replaced by a new one that uses different approaches to scientific understanding that the previous consensus would have rejected.

He termed this a paradigm shift, a term that has since gone on to have a life of its own. This, then, implies that scientific truth is not objective, but is, instead, a result of the consensus of the scientific community at any given time.

This is directly in opposition to Karl Popper's idea of objective falsifiability, as something falsifiable under one paradigm, might not be so under another, and paved the way for Paul Feyerabend's anarchistic view of science that suggests that it is impossible for philosophy to produce a general description of science, nor to conclusively separate it from other forms of knowledge, such as mythology.

Anyway, Morris was having none of this and narrowly avoided fetching an ashtray upside the head for his pains when he explained so to an increasingly furious Kuhn.

Returning to philosophy after many years behind the camera, Morris continues to have no truck with Kuhn's obfuscations, as he would see them, nor with the conventional format of a philosophy text. *The Ashtray* is passionate, polemical and defiantly written in chatty, accessible

language with copious amusing footnotes. Frequently scabrous, Morris acknowledges that it could be seen as a vendetta, and freely admits that it is, as he views Kuhn's idea of the social construction of knowledge as pernicious and disturbing.

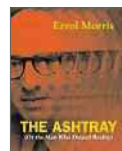
As befits a man whose life has been dedicated to documentary films, Morris sets great store by the existence of an objective truth, and this book is his passionate defence of that truth. While it may be rather late to be considered a direct riposte to Kuhn, and as a result could be seen as somewhat shouting into the void, it is – from Morris's point of view – very timely indeed. He sees the Kuhnian insistence on the social construction of knowledge as an idea that has eroded the importance of truth in public discourse over the last 50 years, and by doing so has laid the groundwork for Donald Trump, his 'fake news', his insistence in the truth of things that are objectively demonstrable not to be so and the failure of modern society to take this seriously.

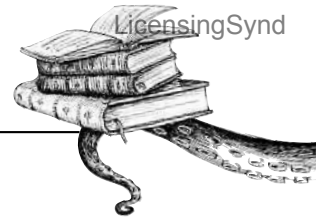
This conflict has a resonance for fortians too, with the tension between the likes of Michel Meurger, who posits in *Lake Monster Traditions* a socially constructed basis for lake monsters and the like, and the nuts-and-bolts tendency that is firmly behind something real and physical being out there, be it a UFO or bigfoot.

I found this all rather enjoyable. If you want an opinionated, impolite page-turner picking a fight with half of the modern philosophy of science, this is definitely the book for you.

Ian Simmons

★★★★★





COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

The Golden Thread Project

Comics Exploring the Strange and Vital Roots of Folksongs from Two Continents

Ed. Geoffrey Coupland, Aidan Saunders

Bughoar Press 2018

Pb, 179pp, £20, ISBN 9781999641405



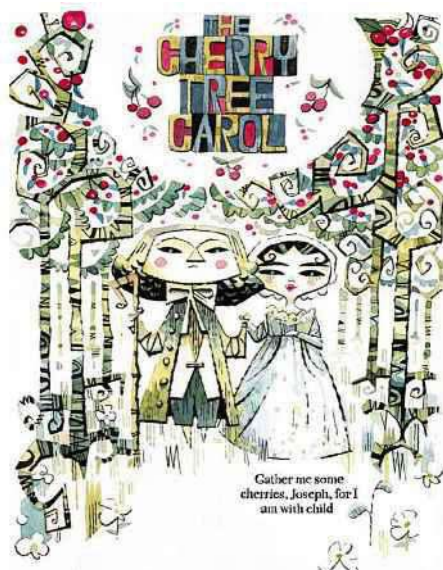
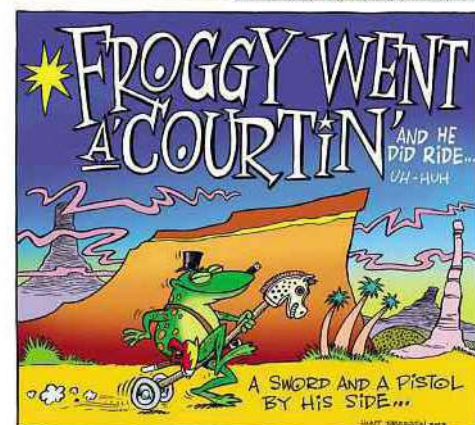
In 1916, pioneering folk song collectors Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles began a series of trips to the USA, travelling in the Appalachians and the states of Kentucky,

Tennessee and the Virginias, in search of living musical history. Sharp had already collected thousands of songs from villages around England, and what he and Karpeles discovered as they met mountain people and singers across rural America was that many of these Appalachian songs were alternate versions of those Sharp had previously recorded back in the UK, brought across the Atlantic by families who'd settled in the mountains hundreds of years before.

The 'Golden Thread' of this book's title, then, refers to this process, by which the folk tradition survived over time: what was, in some senses, geographically specific and utterly local contained sufficient universality to seed itself in other soil and other times, undergoing endless recastings and transmutations that any listener to, say, Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, will recognise in the countless variants, fragmentary echoes, and repetitions of material to be found in songs from different times and places. Here, in another transmutation – from an aural medium to a visual one – a diverse collection of artists working in what we'd broadly call 'comics' present their own responses to some of these songs. There's much to appeal to fortune-tellers, including ballads of ghostly revenge and interactions with Old Nick, as well our very own Hunt Emerson's retelling of "Froggie Went a' Courtin'". There will be a special event at Cecil Sharp House in London on 28 June in which the the 'Golden Thread' will be celebrated in crafts, dance and music: www.cecilsharpshouse.org/component/content/article/21-shared/shared-events/5206-murri-28-jun-2018.

To purchase a copy go to: www.thegoldenthreadproject.com/book/

David Sutton



Clockwise from top left: "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter" by Mark Stafford; "King Kong Kitchie Kitchie Kim-e-o" by Orson Coupland; "John of Hazelgreen" by Jim Stoten; "Froggy Went a' Courtin'" by Hunt Emerson; "The Farmer's Cursed Wife" by Peter Lloyd; "Fatal Flower Garden/Hugh of Lincoln" by ZEEL; "The False Knight on the Road" by Hannah Dyson; "The Cherry Tree Carol" by Jonathan Edwards.

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Throwing down the gauntlet

Cramming everything from an insane purple Titan to a beardy Cap into its two and a half hours, *Infinity War* manages to give us terror, laughter and even tears. It shouldn't work, but it does...



Avengers: Infinity War

Dir Anthony & Joe Russo, US 2018
 On UK release

Marvel Studios' latest *Avengers* film is the culmination of a decade spent bringing comic book properties to cinematic life; the payoff to 10 years' worth of storytelling and character development, it puts into play pretty much every hero we've been introduced to since Robert Downey Jr first donned the Iron Man armour in 2008. It's a success story that no one could really have predicted (one has to feel a teensy bit sorry for the *Guardian's* Peter Bradshaw reviewing that first entry in the MCU back then, when he wrote: "I can't quite see... Iron Man capturing the imagination... this is a franchise that is already beginning to rust") Oh, well; 19 films later, here we are...

Infinity War certainly capitalises on those 10 years of

From New York to Dwarven Nidavellir and the ruins of Titan

world-building; from New York to Wakanda, from Celestial Knowhere to dwarven Nidavellir and the ruins of Titan, the film spans the known Marvel Universe and drops call-backs to every preceding film. More importantly, it knows that what audiences really come for is the characters, and the gang's all (well, nearly all) here. Just as 2012's *The Avengers* showed us how to turn a team comic book into a film, *Infinity War* demonstrates how to do a massive crossover event on screen; in this case, by weaving a daunting array of threads into a hugely exciting yet coherent whole, and doing so with a well-earned swagger. Cleverly, the

film splits its huge cast into often unexpected groupings, between which it then zips breathlessly back and forth. Ever wondered how two Alpha males like Tony Stark and Stephen Strange would get along? Well, here you'll find out. Dreamt of seeing the God of Thunder team up with Rocket Raccoon? Your wishes will come true. As you might guess, some of the results are rather amusing.

With so many good guys at large, it's clear that, this time, the film's unifying factor needs to be its villain. Enter Thanos (the wonderfully scary yet sympathetic Josh Brolin), a mad, bad purple warlord from outer space with a warped Malthusian notion of restoring the balance of the Universe by wiping out half of its inhabitants; to do so, he needs to collect the Infinity Stones, a sextet of brightly-coloured cosmic McGuffins scattered across various locations, some of which – bad luck for us – are on Earth. Step forward the remnants of

the disassembled Avengers, still smarting from the events of *Civil War*, the Guardians of the Galaxy and the armies of Wakanda (not to mention a certain teenager from Queens, who may be in over his head). As the film progresses, it becomes clear that the challenge facing our heroes is possibly too great; a dark tone and ominous sense of threat runs through the film from its opening frames, to its eerie, almost poetic ending.

As a film, *qua* film, *Infinity War* shouldn't work at all; it starts in the middle of an ongoing story, introduces dozens of characters with no exposition and expects you to know what's going on. It makes no concessions to the casual viewer and fully expects you to be *au fait* with the previous 18 entries in the canon if you hope to make any sense of it. Assuming you do have the requisite knowledge (and a grounding in the original comic book sources will only add to your pleasure), then *Infinity War* fully rewards your faith. On its own terms, it's a virtually unqualified success: an epic story, a grand spectacle with breathtaking effects, and a massive ensemble piece done with dexterity and wit.

At a screening at my local cinema – during which you could at times hear a pin drop and at others were treated to cheers, gasps and audible sobs – it became clear that for a young, diverse, mixed-sex audience, these characters are now as beloved as they were to me and my pals when, lo these many moons ago, we were young whippersnappers with our heads stuck in comic books. For a whole new generation, Spidey, Thor, and the rest are part of a shared modern mythology, no longer the preserve just of geeky boys, but of the vast, cinemagoing public worldwide. Excelsior!

David Sutton



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

True Horror

Eleven/Channel 4, UK 2018

When Channel 4's new paranormal docu-drama show hit screens in April, it immediately started trending on Twitter. Both after (and often during) each episode, people posted feverish comments like: "I'm terrified", "No sleep for me tonight" and the charming, "I think I've shit myself". The series that is soiling the nation's pants is *True Horror*, which mixes real-life interviews with dramatic reconstructions of four supernatural encounters. Just don't expect genteel White Ladies or Roman legions marching silently through cellars. Instead, think demonic pigs, malevolent witches and a seven-foot-tall bird-headed demon.

In the first episode, 'Hellfire Farm', an artist and his family are terrorised by a lanky demon on a Welsh Farm. [We covered the story way back in 1995 in **FT80:19**; see also the letter from novelist Mark Chadbourn in **FT174:71**, Ed]. It dries up his business, kills farm animals and – worst of all – clocks up a whopping electricity bill. It's like 'The Amityville Horror: Rural Edition', but I still found its whacky approach made it one of the most interesting of the series.

'Terror In the Woods' starts with teenagers doing typical teenage things. You know... making Rik Mayall parody vids and lighting their own farts; but by journey's end, they're subjected to an all-night paranormal siege in a haunted wood. It's a slight tale, with shades of *The Babadook* and *Blair Witch*, but there are still shivers to be had.

'Ghost in The Wall' is a lot less quirky. Here, a young



Think demonic pigs, malevolent witches and a bird-headed demon

mum doesn't get on with her father-in-law; especially after he dies. "Jimmy always said he'd be in the walls," the family say, as if that's a normal thing. True to his word, he returns post-mortem and tries to kill the woman's kids, or at least drag one into the wall. But is he trying to protect them, or take them away forever?

Finally, in 'The Witches' Prison' we get a case that many *FT* readers will be familiar with. A young woman is tormented by a long dead witch, when she buys The Cage – a former jail

for sorcerous miscreants in St Osyth, Essex [see **FT293:19**, **FT327:34-37**].

The key to understanding the appeal of *True Horror* (or indeed lack of it) comes down to which word you emphasise. Focus on the 'True' part and you'll be disappointed. There's no serious investigation here, and the witness accounts aren't challenged. We could get cross about it, but that's like being angry that a rollercoaster doesn't have enough backstory. *True Horror* was made as a thrill ride – and in that sense, it works. Personally, I found the horror elements to be fairly clichéd, with jump scares too often telegraphed with the obligatory ambient music crash. A character even shuts a glass bathroom cabinet and – oh my! – there's a figure standing in the reflection. But give it a whirl, and you'll find some novel, creepy images in amongst the noisy stuff.

There really should be more space on TV for serious paranormal investigation, yet it's true of much fortune-telling that when strange things do happen to everyday people, the results are sometimes just plain frightening. In that sense, this is like a TV version of the *FT*'s 'It Happened to Me' section. The focus isn't on in-depth analysis, but people telling their own spooky stories and campfire tales. Don't expect more than that, and you'll be happy. Like Twitter user Kim Creswell Davies, who shared the following thoughts: "Jesus... This is REALLY F*****G SCARY. I've squealed and jumped so violently, I've pulled a muscle in my neck."



Arcadia

Dir Paul Wright, UK 2018
On UK release from 21 June

Much as his debut feature, *For Those in Peril*, featured elements of folklore and superstition, those same elements saturate writer and director Paul Wright's latest effort, *Arcadia*, with a deeply ethereal energy. Here, the BAFTA Award winner has used more than 100 archive film clips from the past 100 years to create a deeply original and atmospheric piece.

Despite the use of archive footage, *Arcadia* is not a documentary as such; Wright does indeed take the viewer on a journey, but it is not solely an historical one, instead, it is a spiritual journey to rekindle the viewer's connection with these lands. This is evident in how the film moves, not only through the past century of British life and culture as captured on film, as well as the development of the medium itself, but also through both the literal and metaphorical connection the people of these islands have with the soil of their homeland and the local traditions; traditions that so often become lost over time, only to be occasionally rediscovered later.

Passing from rural traditions to industrial chaos, Wright utilises his clips to paint a picture that at times seems to be channelling the kind of primal energy and haunting visuals associated with the early works of David Lynch. However, Wright most definitely has his own unique voice.

The Lynchian quality of the film is further emphasised by the soundtrack, courtesy of Portishead's Adrian Utley and Goldfrapp's Will Gregory; when the more primal elements of the narrative are explored, the music often pounds like a heartbeat, at once unsettling and soothing. This helps to further establish the strangely grounded yet otherworldly atmosphere of the film; at other moments, more conventional rock-like compositions allow viewers to find themselves at ease, even if never for very long.

Eventually, we come full circle through the seasons, cultural traditions and primal energies of the land. At first they are conveyed in their raw, unbridled

forms, then become all but lost before, eventually, the narrative structure leads us back to the source whence all derives and where we, in essence, all belong.

For all its appeal, *Arcadia* is not a film that will please everyone, as it is simply too abstract for some tastes. However, for those who take an interest in more experimental cinema, films that are as much about experience as entertainment, this is an intriguing piece of work that is both artfully ambiguous and sharply direct in expression.

Leyla Mikkelsen



My Friend Dahmer

Dir Andrew Getty, US 2017
On UK release from 1 June

Serial killers will seemingly never cease to fascinate us. Aside from the obvious appeal of the forensic side of things, delving into the psyches of murderers to explore what they were like before the killings began is also an interesting exercise, as we try to understand what makes such evildoers tick.

Based on John "Derf" Backderf's graphic memoir of the same name, *My Friend Dahmer* concerns Jeffrey Dahmer's teenage years and how his taste for murder and mutilation would slowly develop until he picked up hitchhiker Steven Hicks in 1978. Being more of a drama with a few thriller elements, the film paints a picture of an awkward young man who has a worrying fascination with treating roadkill in a manner that was unquestionably a precursor for how he would deal with and dispose of his human victims later in life.

However, much like the graphic novel, the film places more emphasis on Dahmer's desire to try to fit in as he struggles to deal with social awkwardness, alcoholism, his parents' divorce and coming to terms with his own homosexuality. As with the source material, there is a lot of empathy, and even humour, in the way Dahmer is portrayed; all the while, though, there is an undercurrent of unease that continues to grow as the film unfolds. Instrumental

in conveying this is actor Ross Lynch, who portrays the titular character. Throughout the film, he manages to convey a convincing sense of vulnerability, just as he also ensures that Dahmer's transitions through awkwardness to frustration and eventually homicidal anger feel both natural and unsettling.

That being said, your takeaway from the film will depend on your interest in the subject of the early life of a notorious serial killer; some will enjoy the fly-on-the-wall perspective that allows them to simply observe Dahmer and pick up on the subtle clues about his character, whereas others will at times find the film somewhat vague in its storytelling and feel that the narrative is allowed to meander too much.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Mansfield 66/67

Dir David B Ebersole & Todd Hughes, US/UK 2017
Saffron Hill, £9.99 (DVD)

Opening with a dance number slyly paraphrasing the one featured in the opening credits of the quintessential Jayne Mansfield vehicle *The Girl Can't Help It* and quickly proclaiming that it is detailing a true story based on rumours and hearsay, the documentary *Mansfield 66/67* does not pretend to be anything it is not.

Focusing on the final two years of the larger-than-life Hollywood bombshell, this sensationalist but loving portrayal of the busty beauty focuses first and foremost on her many marriages; however, it also dedicates a substantial amount of screen time to the relationship Mansfield reportedly had with the founder of the Church of Satan – none other than Anton LaVey.

Examining the myths and legends surrounding Mansfield's untimely death and the many misconceptions about what actually happened, the film serves up interviews with a wide array of alternative pop culture figures, from trash culture icon John Waters to occultist filmmaker Kenneth Anger, as well as various experts of some

of the more niche elements of sociology. The result is a colourful, interesting and often rather amusing documentary that the filmmakers clearly don't intend you to take too seriously. As such, while the interviewees and archival footage all show that the film's intentions in exploring this particular part of Hollywood lore are fair enough, those who wish to uncover new information will likely find the documentary too flimsy and frivolous for their liking. It should also be noted that as fun as the initial use of interpretive dancing is, the continued use of this element – as well as the at times painfully awkward recreations of scenarios that would have been better served by simply using stock footage – becomes a tedious and needless distraction, which somewhat detracts from the enjoyment of the piece as a whole.

However, that being said, *Mansfield 66/67* largely remains a gloriously tongue-in-cheek investigation of a pop culture icon whose increasingly absurd lifestyle and shocking demise continue to fascinate. Connoisseurs of trash culture with a healthy sense of humour will likely be entertained for the duration of the documentary's runtime, but the film's appeal is a superficial one.

Leyla Mikkelsen



American Gods

Dir various, US 2017
Studiocanal, £19.99 (Blu-ray), £14.99 (DVD)

Originally broadcast on the Starz network, this US series is based on the acclaimed novel by Neil Gaiman and stars, among many others, Ricky Whittle, Ian MacShane and Emily Browning. Whittle plays the improbably named Shadow Moon, who is released early from prison after he learns that his beloved wife has been killed in a car accident. At the lowest of low ebbs he encounters the eccentric Mr Wednesday, a garrulous rogue who offers him employment as his bodyguard and factotum. As he spends time in Wednesday's company, he meets a number of the man's bizarre associates and

comes to believe that he has got himself mixed up in something beyond all understanding.

I don't think I'm giving the game away too much to say that *American Gods* is about an impending conflict, possibly apocalyptic, between the world's all but forgotten (but still powerful) ancient gods and the media and tech savvy upstarts who have come to dominate the modern age. The story follows Wednesday's attempts to rally religious and mythical deities to aid his cause, all the while trying to avoid the eyes of the enemy. A series of vignettes at the start of each episode relates how these deities have come to reside in America and why their worshippers have dwindled.

There's a lot going on in this show and even if you have read the novel, as I have, it takes some time to get a grip on it. It's not that the set-up is baffling in itself – after all, it's essentially a road movie – but the content, steeped as it is in folklore, myth, legend and in some cases history, is incredibly rich. It's the kind of programme that makes you get straight on to Google afterwards to find out more about the figures to whom you've just been introduced. Not many fictional series can open your eyes to Slavic deities, West African folklore and ancient Egyptian gods.

Visually, the show is stunning. Okay, there are a few too many David Lynch-style extreme close-ups of matches being struck and cigarettes being lit, but in general it's a feast for the eyes, and the special effects are not intrusive. One highlight early on is an action sequence centred around a lynching in the pouring rain; it's quite stunning.

This is proper grown-up television which deals with big themes while presenting them from a human perspective. It makes you think, and it invites you to consider the validity, indeed necessity, of all kinds of deep human beliefs. It is, however, graphic stuff, and the language is ripe throughout, so this is probably not one to watch with your great aunt, unless she happens to be extremely understanding.

Daniel King



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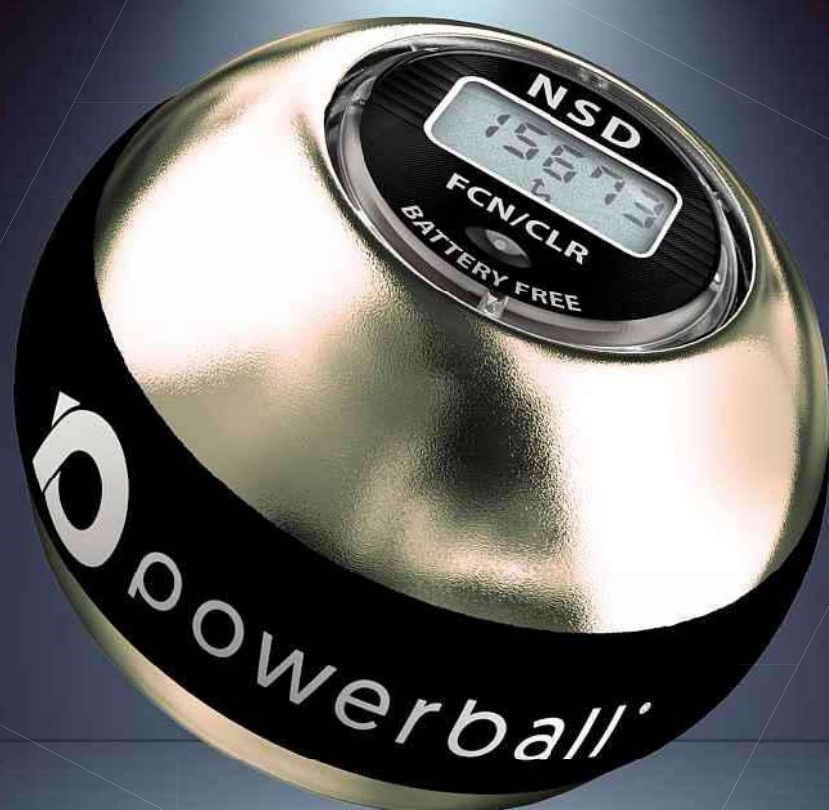
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Library legionaries

Regarding Alan Murdie's articles about Roman ghosts [FT364:18-20, 365:16-18]: I used to work as a library assistant in Northumberland and occasionally worked at Hexham public library. Hexham is in Hadrian's Wall country. It wasn't a Roman settlement, but it's about four miles (6.4km) from Corbridge, which was. When I worked at Hexham library in 2016, I was told about an apparition of Roman ghosts. A colleague of my colleague was working alone one evening in an office on the first or second floor when a troop of ghostly Roman legionaries marched through the wall and through the office. The witness was terrified and refused to work in that office thereafter.

My colleague did name the witness, although I can't remember his name. My understanding was that he wasn't the 'type' to see ghosts. Obviously coming from me it is third hand but I was told the name of the person who experienced it, so it wasn't a 'friend of a friend' thing.

Anna Jesson
Northumberland

Almasty identification

I greatly enjoyed Richard Freeman's talk on the Almasty at Weird Weekend North, which recently took place in Cheshire. My brother and I were discussing the talk afterwards and he offered another explanation for some of the sightings: Russian soldiers on military training manoeuvres. Although this may sound something of a stretch, a google image search for 'Russian sniper ghillie suit' will shed some light on why these soldiers might be construed as being something other than what they actually are. The rig they wear makes them look like Swamp Thing going to a fancy dress party, dressed up as a Yeti (or vice versa). It's easy to see how they could be perceived as a bipedal unknown human-like creature, especially in low light or darkness. Also the range of the Almasty would take them close to the Chechen border, so there will certainly be covert military

SIMULACRA CORNER



Cliff's face

Mark Morgan saw this cliff face in October 2013, while wandering up a dry riverbed near the Fort Bravo film studios in Spain.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

activity in at least part of its range. It may also explain the sounds the Almasty are supposed to make – a 'boom' sound followed by 'bird-like noises'. This could be a military weapon noise followed by walkie-talkie chatter or audio electronic code. It would also – dare I say it – explain their appetite for booze, which is often reported to be taken by the Almasty. Of course this wouldn't explain all sightings, as the Almasty have been reported for over a century and a half at least, but may be worth considering for some of the recent reports.

Daniel Clay
Formby, Merseyside

A good Catholic

It is strange that Pedro Peirone, the man who reported the mysterious melted shoe prints in his car [FT365:4], should be considered a more credible witness because he was "a good Catholic... (who) always put his faith in the Blessed Virgin Mary, and never really believed in paranormal activity". Presumably, as a good Catholic, Señor Peirone believes that saying a few Latin words over a wafer will cause it to turn into the body of Jesus. If that isn't paranormal activity, I don't know what is.

Martin Stubbs
London

Certainly a conspiracy

In his interesting and informative letter about the 2001 attacks on the US [FT365:74], Matt Elliot says: "...assuming it was a conspiracy..." I must remind him that no matter who you believe was responsible for 9/11, it was a conspiracy. Illuminati or al Qaeda, it was a conspiracy. When a group of people meet together in secret and plot to carry out terrorist attacks it is de facto a conspiracy. The word is defined as "a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful" or "the action of plotting or conspiring".

Paul Whyte
Dublin

Pink frog in rock

In 1987 a shower of pink frogs was reported in Gloucestershire [FT51:14-15, 52:79]. I recently found the following report from the *Colorado Springs Gazette*, dated 17 February 1908.

"FOUND A PINK FROG. Into the glare of the limelight, that beats upon the nature-faking arena, Congressman Howell of Utah has leaped with great self-confidence. His initial contribution to the chapters of natural history has to do with a pink frog that was found residing in the solid rock, 600 feet below the surface of the earth. Mr Howell is convinced that the story is true. He got it from a constituent, and would be afraid to call it false, even if he did not believe in it."

Richard Muirhead
By email

Elizabeth & Baphomet

Christopher Josiffe's excellent article ('The Goat Headed God', FT365:28-35) reminded me of the recent media controversy concerning the distant Moorish pedigree of our royal family. If one of Josiffe's theories is correct about the misinterpreted Islamic roots of this satanic icon, we must face the fact that Queen Elizabeth II is herself a direct descendent of 'Baphomet', and that at its height Baphomet's empire ruled

LETTERS

a quarter of the Earth and a similar proportion of its inhabitants. I note his power has been somewhat on the wane of late. Might the much fetishised return of his most potent paraphernalia (blue passports) lead to a magical revival?

Ryan Shirlow
Leeds

Which Wych Elm is which?

I query the species of tree involved in the feature entitled 'Who Put Bella in the Wych Elm?' [FT364:34-41]. A Witch Hazel is an American large bush, used medicinally and for its scented flowers, and grows in acid soils uncommon in the UK except in bogs and pinewoods. Hazel is a native large bush or small woodland tree much loved by rodents for its autumn nuts. Although it can be coppiced and may live for a thousand years, it never makes a significant trunk. Wych Elm is a native that used to be a major tree in the countryside and would be much more able to harbour a corpse, so I am assuming that the tree referred to throughout was a Wych Elm. It was certainly not a Witch Hazel.

Equally confusing were the references to Prof. Webster's forensic findings. The picture reproduced does not match the text – for instance, the descriptions of wedding ring, cardigan, skirt and underskirt all differ from the details in the picture. Lastly, there was an explanation of how the right hand might

have been buried (as it was found) as a Hand of Glory to prevent 'Bella' walking, but in the next paragraph: "Prof Webster's original report attached no importance to the missing hand... an animal carried it away." Is the buried right hand being conflated with the missing left hand? If this is a fair representation of the forensic analysis of 1943, it's hardly surprising that the murder went unsolved.

Georgina Skipper
Wyke Regis, Dorset

Glastonbury deception

I was quite depressed reading the Forum piece on the mystic archaeologist Bligh Bond [FT363:50-51], as I had just bought the book *The Gate of Remembrance* with great expectation – and although FT has many times demolished my cherished perceptions of seemingly plausible concepts, this is the first time you have done so when the book in question has just this minute popped through the letter box. I did my best with reading it after seeing your article, but, knowing it was likely a forgery along the lines of the *Urantia* book, I couldn't take it seriously, and it is now in the bin. [For more on Bligh Bond, see FT143:40-44, 249:50-54.]

However, regarding Glastonbury and the Abbey itself – were they not built upon the fraud and deception of pretending to have found the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, thereby milking the aspirations of pilgrims who flocked to the town thereafter? I have to wonder if the dissolution of the Abbey was far from being the great spiritual disaster today's purveyors of mysticism would have us believe, and actually appropriate karma for an Abbey and town funded by the gullible. Today's ruins, I am starting to realise, are a symbol of the "spiritual miasma" of the place past and present, and also of the

emptiness of soul of those who allow themselves to get tangled up in the deception.

I don't doubt that the locale has an etheric beauty about it, but I have always had a sense, which I had ignored up till now out of wishful thinking, that the entire town is covered in a sickly tar-like substance deriving from base commercial interests posing as spiritual gurus.

My own worst experience of this was while staying in a bed-and-breakfast with a massive crystal in every room, where the proprietor offered to channel your own higher self for advice and instruction while undergoing a "guided meditation". The highlight of this "advice" was that I should sign up for a further course of spiritual counselling at a cost of a further £280, and despite my protestations that I couldn't afford it, was pressured relentlessly to sign up, including the offer of writing a series of post-dated cheques. Even worse than this, the suggestion was implanted in me to sign up for this additional service while I was in a semi trance state.

I have had to endure many other instances like this, before finally, and belatedly, realising how much of the modern New Age is a scam. But at least now I can take the Abbey ruins as a symbol of what it all means.

Michael Smith
Dorchester, Dorset

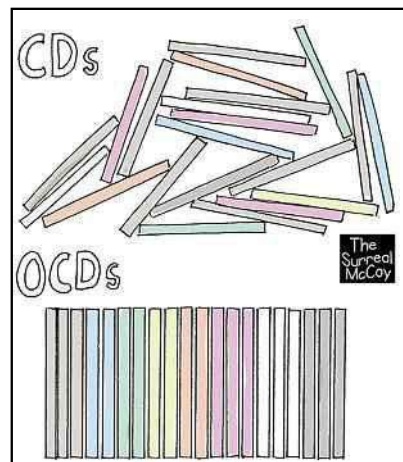
Haunted Generation

Readers clearly related to 'The Haunted Generation' [FT354:30-37], but I think it's important to point out that, since the rise of mass media, every generation has probably been a "haunted generation" in its own way, and felt as privately touched and moved as the individuals in the article. My mother, for example, grew up attending the great cinema horror classics of the 1930s and early 1940s. Though films like *Dr. X* (1931), *The Black Cat* (1934), *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *Cat People* (1942), *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943) and *The Uninvited* (1944) are considered classics and mainstays

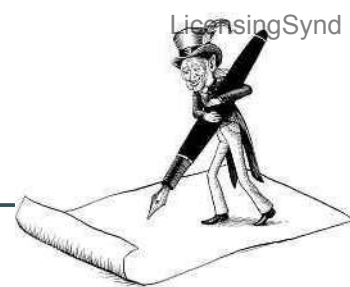
of 'fantastic cinema' today, it's important to keep in mind that, at the time of their release, they were new, unknown, and, in some cases, unprecedented.

Americans growing up in the 1960s and 1970s like myself were inundated on all sides by the 'fantastic' in multiple forms: weekly television dramas like *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) and *The Outer Limits* (1963-1965) were supplemented by science fiction adventure series like *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1964-1968), *Lost in Space* (1965-1968), *Time Tunnel* (1966-1967), *The Invaders* (1967-1968) and *Land of the Giants* (1968-1970). The gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows*, which ran from 1966-1971, sent school children across the country racing home to catch the latest daily episode, and there were numerous comedies with paranormal motifs, like *Mr. Ed* (1961-1966), *My Favorite Martian* (1963-1966), *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters* (both 1964-1966), *Bewitched* (1964-1972), *My Mother the Car* (1965-1966) and *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-1970). Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color aired programmes like *The Scarecrow of Romney Marsh* (1964), which I found memorably spooky as a young boy.

Forrest J Ackerman's monthly *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine, with its dramatic Basil Gogos cover art, enthusiastically revived the monsters of the preceding four decades while promoting those of the present era, and its publisher, Warren Magazines, also produced *Creepy*, *Eerie* and *Vampirella*, black and white, magazine-sized horror comics with amazing covers by Frank Frazetta and others. Other readily available monster periodicals were *Castle of Frankenstein* (1962-1975) and *The Monster Times* (1972-1976), which was folded and shaped like a tabloid. Numerous paperback houses brought what seemed like endless inexpensive volumes of the work of L Frank Baum, Edgar Rice Burroughs (including the complete Pellucidar and John Carter of Mars series), HP Lovecraft, CS Lewis, JRR Tolkien, Ian Fleming, John Norman, Ursula K LeGuin and others, often with moody, eye-grabbing cover art. Marilyn Ross, pen name



THE SURREAL MCCOY



for William Edward Daniel Ross, produced 33 *Dark Shadows* novels with catchy titles like *Barnabas*, *Quentin and the Nightmare Assassin* (1970). If your neighbourhood had a bookshop or drugstore, copies of these editions were everywhere.

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s and 'realistic' television shows like *All in the Family* (1971-1979) and *Maude* (1972-1978) became the standard, the 'fantastic' shifted to the new format of the 'made-for-television-movie,' most of which were horror films characterised by pessimistic endings in which good did not prevail. These included *How Awful About Allan*, *The House That Would Not Die*, *Crowhaven Farm and Night Slaves* (1970), *Duel* (1971), *The Night Stalker*, *Home for the Holidays*, *Haunts of the Very Rich* and the highly memorable *Gargoyles* (1972), *The Night Strangler*, *Satan's School for Girls*, *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*, *A Cold Night's Death* (1973) and many others. 1970s American television horror series included Rod Serling's *Night Gallery* (1970-1973) and *The Night Stalker* (1974-1975, adapted from the made-for-television movie).

While today some of these cultural products have been forgotten and others remain well known, again, it's important to realise that, when they debuted, they were often fresh and unanticipated. Who could ever forget the young women in *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* parting the flower arrangement on the kitchen table and finding a hideous bald dwarf with a veined head inside? *The Outer Limits*, with its grim vision of an apparent clockwork universe collapsing in the face of the daimonic and the unknown, kept me glued to the television, and left me both inspired and afraid to go to bed. Since I saw a lot of these programmes before I was ever taken to church, the monsters on *The Outer Limits* and the strange scenarios of *The Twilight Zone*, with its living mannequins and monstrous nurses, in some ways subverted any chance I had of seeing the world in a purely Christian light. Before I had been

introduced to the idea of Christ, I had been transfigured by *The Zanti Misfits*, who seemed liked little demigods to me.

And surely those who grew up in the 1950s experienced something very similar, with that era's dozens of memorable highbrow-to-lowbrow science fiction films, giant insect and rubber-suited monster movies?

Joseph Barnes

New York

Scimitar cat dating

I enjoyed Rob Ixer's review of *William Boyd Dawkins and the Victorian Science of Cave Hunting* by Mark John White [FT365:62], a book I've read and enjoyed. However, I have to point out some small errors regarding my favourite extinct species – the scimitar-toothed cat. Dawkins's excavation of a scimitar cat canine from Creswell Crags on the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border was hugely controversial, not because the creatures were unknown in Europe but because they were thought to have died out 200,000 years before the strata at Creswell were laid down.

In fact there are multiple sites where scimitar cats are known from Europe and Britain, including Kent's Cavern in Devon and the beaches of East Anglia, although these are mostly thought to be much older than the Creswell tooth. Despite a recent radiocarbon date from a scimitar cat mandible dredged from the bottom of the North Sea that suggests they did survive until the time of Creswell, not everyone agrees that the date is valid. Whether they went extinct in Europe at 300,000 or 30,000 years is an open question that has big ramifications for our understanding of Ice Age communities. The scimitar cat was first described with the binomial *Machairodus latidens* by Richard Owen, but is now known as *Homotherium latidens*. This is a completely different genus and tribe from the exclusively American dirk-toothed cat genus *Smilodon*, which is known from abundant tarpit remains.

Dr Ross Barnett

Langley Park, Durham



Snow rollers

Overnight on 5-6 February 2018, it snowed in Fife, Scotland. I noticed the snow, which was about 3in (76mm) deep in places, was very light and loosely packed, what could be described as 'fluffy'. There was no other snowfall that day and throughout the morning the lying snow was blown around by a reasonably strong wind. Around lunchtime my friend Anne, who was out travelling near the Fife town of Kelty, sent me these photographs of a field full of snowballs – or what are known as "snow rollers".

Alan Gibb

Kirkaldy, Fife



LETTERS

Hawk moths?



Ian I'Anson says the hummingbird hawk moth is not found in the UK, while Gareth Young states that it is "a very rare visitor to these shores" [FT363:70-71]. In fact, *Macroglossum stellatarum* is an annual visitor to the British Isles, and it is not unusual for the total numbers recorded in a year to be in hundreds or thousands. For example, in 2017 there were 5,428 reports from 4,505 participants in Butterfly Conservation's "Migrant Watch", the third highest number of records since Migrant Watch began in 2008 (after 2011 and 2015).

The species is most often reported in southern and eastern Britain, though this is no doubt correlated with the higher population and hence observer density there; it can be seen in all parts of Britain and Ireland, including the Hebrides, Shetland and Orkney, etc. It can even be seen in winter; I know of one seen on the Isles of Scilly on 28 January this year, though winter records are not too unusual.

The species is mainly a day-flier, though occasionally turns up in light traps used for catching moths. As a migrant it is not thought to survive the British winter, perhaps due to damp rather than cold. It can, however, breed as a result of migrants laying eggs in early summer – I know of two larvae found in Northern Ireland in 2017 (though I know of only two other such examples, one of which I found myself in Co. Fermanagh in 1986).

Ian Rippey
County Armagh

Ian I'Anson is right to consider hawk moths as a possible explanation for some fairy sightings – but the larger, more strikingly coloured hawk moths that would be the most likely culprits are rare in Britain, like the death's

head hawk moth with its facial simulacrum, the Oleander hawk moth, and the extraordinary Spanish moon moth. I first saw a hummingbird hawk moth about 20 years ago in the garden with my mother. Our first reaction was "What the hell is that?" and our second, on consulting a reference book, was "Common? You're joking!" I can certainly see how a neophyte might mistake one of the much bigger, rarer hawk moths for a fairy, or something else paranormal.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

We had hummingbird hawk moths in our Hampshire garden for several years running. I recall that they favoured purple petunia flowers. They looked quite drab when at rest with wings folded

but were very different when hovering over the flowers.

Matt Wallace

By email

Regarding the 'fairies' spotted by Rachel McDonald [FT359:75] and Jim D [FT355:76] – might these have been hummingbirds? Their description as "hovering over yellow roses", flying "with the body hanging down and the wings out at the back" and "around the size of my palm" would suit most species of this avian family well, as I can confirm from multiple observations in British Columbia and Central America; while feeding, the birds could easily be mistaken for some odd-looking large insects. There would still be some mystery, as the birds would be out of place in British counties.

As for the 'tear in reality'

described by Jim D [FT359:75], if there was wind at the time of the observation could the culprit have been a black plastic bag zipping past in the air?

Marinus van der Sluijs
Namyangju, South Korea

Probably sulphur

The two-part article on the Bell Witch by Roger Clarke [FT359:44-49, 360:52-57] was a gem and one of the best discussions FT has published – and you've published some doozies. Apart from the nicely detailed thematic progress of the piece and the generous notes on sources (and who wouldn't want to follow up some of these?) the aspect that attracted me most was the simple yet carefully arranged composition of its prose which, in places, demanded a rereading just for Clarke's attention to expression; a joy to read.

I might be able to offer a small clue to one puzzled footnote [#6, FT359:49]. Clarke claims "no idea" about the identity of "spunk" – an ingredient in "Uncle Zeke's" African charm. It is most probably sulphur, probably acquired from match-heads; all the other ingredients are similarly fire-themed. The etymology begins with either (or both) ME and OHG words referring to a "spark" – it's fairly easy to google.

Whether or not Uncle Zeke's charm was "clearly an African charm" as Clarke assumes or just a charm made by an African slave – using whatever he had at hand – is a moot point. But his plaintive "Those dead Native Americans who lived here, are still here, because they don't have anywhere to go" is problematic for anyone speaking in 1819 Tennessee – the expression "Native American" is clearly anachronistic. If "Uncle Zeke" ever said it (which I doubt), anyone listening would have assumed he was talking about dead white blokes born in the country and certainly not "Indians".

Robert T Walker
Wagga Wagga, New South Wales



On the move

To me, this looks like an Ent striding up the Cwmdu valley in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Richard Thomas, Sudbury, Middlesex

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Surprised centurion

I write in connection with Alan Murdie's Ghostwatch [FT365:16-18], in which he asks where the Roman ghosts are. The following encounter was told to me about 15 years ago, by a colleague at work. Mike lived in the Watford area, and was inclined to outdoor pursuits (poaching!). On the day in question, he was in some woods near St Albans, hunting for rabbits with a couple of friends, using ferrets and nets. The encounter, as he described it to me, was as follows:

"It was a sunny late summer day, and we had been walking through the woods for some time. We hadn't had much luck so far, and the other two were walking ahead. We came to a fallen tree, and I sat down to have a rest, because it was quite warm, while the others walked ahead. The sun was shining down through the leaves, and it was very peaceful, so I stretched out on the tree trunk, and closed my eyes for a moment, to enjoy the sun. A shadow crossed my face, and I opened my eyes, expecting it to be one of the others, come to see where I had got to. Looking down at me was a Roman centurion, with a horrified look of surprise on his face. I immediately rolled off the log, on the other side to where he was standing, and quickly turned back, expecting to see a re-enactor looking at me – but there was no one there. In fact, there wasn't a trace of anyone nearby. I reckon it was a ghost."

So that was Mike's very brief account, and he did not elaborate on the appearance of the centurion. Mike was a very down-to-earth man, and in the 15 years I knew him, never given to flights of fancy. The matter-of-fact way he told the story seemed to me to have a basis in a genuine experience. In the intervening years, I lost touch with him, but remember his story, simply because it was so out of



character for him to talk about anything that wasn't factual, and based on personal experience. He mentioned re-enactors, and so I guess they were (and maybe still are) active in the St Albans area, which was a Roman settlement about 2,000 years ago. The thing that struck me about this experience was that it was unlike the more usual ghostly encounter, where the observer witnesses a sort of replay of past events, and whose participants are unaware of human observers. In Mike's story, the centurion appeared to see and react to him, as if he didn't expect him to be there, and as if Mike was as out of place to him as the centurion was to Mike. Unfortunately, I don't know the exact location, or time, and have lost contact with Mike.

David Poulten
Ealing, London

Ghost in top hat

Last October I went to Highgate Cemetery in north London, famous for being the last resting place of Karl Marx amongst other notables. I had a look around the Gothic cemetery and noticed some distance away a tall thin man wearing a Victorian style

top hat. Thinking that there was some filming going on, as the place has been used as a venue for horror films and music videos since the days of Hammer, I continued walking around and exploring. Eventually I went back to the exit and spoke to the man in the portacabin. I said that I thought that I had seen the Highgate Vampire of 1970s lore; instead he just calmly pointed out that I had seen a ghost. Apparently, the man in the top hat has been seen in the cemetery for many years. My hair stood up on the back of my neck and I quickly departed. I am reluctant to go back there again.

Peter Elkins
Surrey

Kentish oddities

In the late 1970s I was 16 and living in Swanley, north Kent, and had a paper round in the nearby village of Crockenhill. I collected the papers from Swanley station and cycled round delivering them on a Saturday evening. Returning home one early autumn evening, I was on the section of the B258 with embankments either side that ran between Green Court Road and the bridge over the A20. At

the base of one of these and on the opposite eastern side of the road I saw in front of me a large dog walking in the same direction I was travelling. It was dark in colour but not black, more like a muddy grey brown. Its fur was short but slightly rough and it was about the size of a large Labrador but much leaner in build. It was alone and clearly illuminated by the streetlights and remaining daylight. I kept a wary eye on it as I got closer. At the same time our local bus (the 477) was drawing up behind me and as it swung out to overtake, its headlights went across to where the dog was walking; the dog quickly faded and disappeared.

After the bus had gone I stopped and walked across to where I had last seen the dog. Having assumed it was a real dog, I never 'felt' anything even after I watched it fade away. Afterwards I told my family and a few others over the years, but never had an explanation or heard of anyone else experiencing anything at this location.

A couple of years later, deeper in the Kent countryside, I entered a small wood to relieve myself and was struck by a very real sense of something unpleasant being there, which seemed to centre on some bumpy ground towards the centre of the wood. I made myself walk through the wood and on leaving the other side the feeling disappeared. Returning the same way, the feeling of oppression returned, very like that of being watched by something that wanted to cause harm, but suffusing the whole wood.

It's many years now since I have lived in Kent and no doubt if I returned to the wood I wouldn't be able to separate my original experience from what I might actually feel. But if you happen to enter a wood some miles south west of Ashford and not far from where a railway crosses a road – and feel something unpleasant – then do write in.

Andrew Long
By email

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an

intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

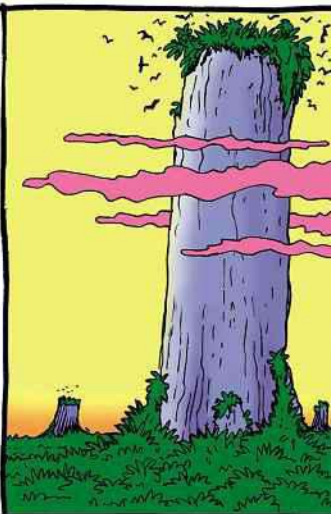
DINO-BOY

HUNT EMERSON

DINO-BOY EMERGES FROM THE FOREST...



HE HAS SCRAMBLED AND FALLEN FROM AN INACCESSIBLE JUNGLE-TOPPED MESA, WHERE EVOLUTION, LIKE, HASN'T HAPPENED, MAN! AND, LIKE, DINOSAURS RULE!



SO DINO-BOY HITS THE HIGHWAY...



NO ROADSIDE CHICKEN YARD IS SAFE FROM THE DINO-BOY!



OH, DINO-BOY- YOU'RE SO COOL!

HE'S SO CUTE!

DINO-BOY, YOU'RE THE BEST!

HEY, CHICKENS! I'M THE DINO-BOY, DIG?

OH! CLUCKING OH!

...UNTIL HE HITS THE ROAD AGAIN...



≡SIGH!≡

≡CLUCKING SIGH!≡

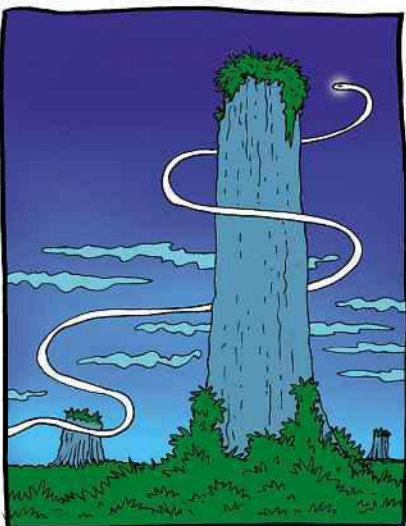
BYE-BYE!

UNTIL...



OK, SUNSHINE-HOLIDAY'S OVER! BACK UP THE HILL WITH YOU!

YEAH, MAN- I DIG IT...



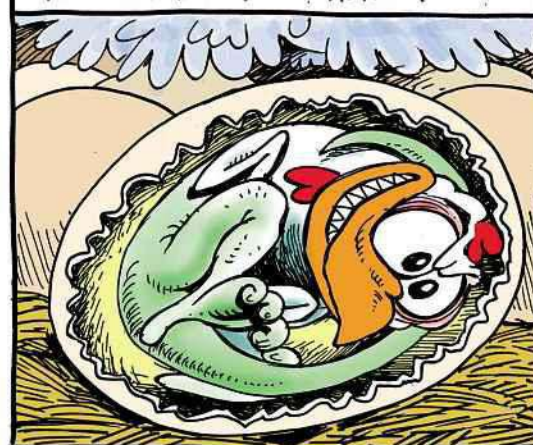
STRANGE LIGHTS AROUND THE HIGH MESA AGAIN...

Ai-Ai!

SI, I SEE THEM! WE CAN THANK THE GREAT ONES THAT THEY DO NOT INTERFERE WITH WE SIMPLE FOLK AND OUR SIMPLE CHICKENS!



BUT- A GENERATION OF EGGS IS PREPARING TO HATCH...



DOM-DA-DOM-DOM!!!

COMING NEXT MONTH



THE DEATH TRANCE

ANTOINE WIERTZ AND THE LAST THOUGHTS OF A SEVERED HEAD



WILD MAN BLUES

THE SPANISH WOLF MAN WHO HATES LIFE AS A HUMAN



THE MANDELA EFFECT,
ORKNEY MERMAIDS,
HOMO ECONOMICS,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 368

ON SALE 21 JUNE 2018

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Ateeq Rafiq, 24, died after he was crushed in a freak accident on Friday, 9 March involving an electronic VIP seat at a cinema in Birmingham. At the end of the film at the Vue Cinema in Star City, he dropped his phone between the Gold Class seats. As he attempted to retrieve it, an electric footrest clamped on his head. His wife frantically tried to free him and staff rushed to help. After 10 minutes, they managed to break the footrest and release him. He was in cardiac arrest, but paramedics managed to restart his heart before rushing him to hospital with serious head injuries. He died from a heart attack the following Friday. [PA] *Guardian*, *BBC News*, 20 Mar; *Sun*, 20+22 Mar; *D.Express*, 22 Mar 2018.

A woman died in a fireball near a school in south-west London. Fire crews were called to Queens Road, Richmond, just after 1pm on 12 March, where the woman was found engulfed in flames. She was pronounced dead shortly afterwards. The incident took place close to Christ's Sixth Form College. The death was being treated as unexplained. *This is Local London*, 12 Mar; *(London) Eve. Standard*, 13 Mar 2018.

Sixteen people were killed and dozens more injured after lightning struck a Seventh-Day Adventist church in Rwanda on 10 March. Fourteen were killed on the spot as lightning hit the church in the Nyaruguru district of the southern province and two others died later from their injuries. The local mayor said 140 people involved in the incident had been taken to hospital and district health centres. The day before, lightning had struck a group of 18 students, killing one. Lightning killed 30 and injured 61 people and killed 48 livestock in Rwanda in 2016. *BBC News*, 11 Mar; *D.Telegraph*, *Times*, 12 Mar 2018.

Philip Shard, 60, an IT consultant from Rushmere near Ipswich, was struck by lightning on 27 May 2017 while sheltering from hail under a large conifer tree at Flynn Valley Golf Club in Winstead, Suffolk. He was found collapsed by Brian Goldsmith, his friend and playing partner, and was rushed to hospital, where he died from a hypoxic brain injury four days later, on 31 May. *D.Telegraph*, 27 Sept 2017.

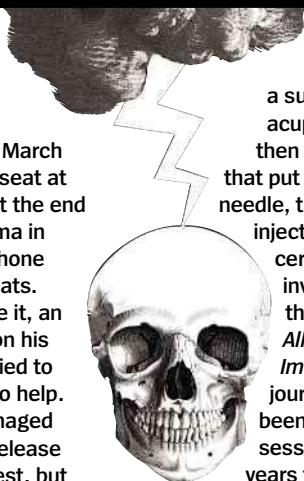
A 55-year-old woman died in a Madrid hospital some weeks after undergoing

a supposedly routine "bee acupuncture" treatment and then suffering an allergic reaction that put her in a coma. Instead of a needle, the acupuncture practitioner injects bee venom into the body at certain points. The case in Spain involved live bees, according to the *Journal of Investigational Allergology and Clinical Immunology*, a Spanish medical journal. The patient had already been going to bee acupuncture sessions every four weeks for two years to treat stiff muscles and stress. She had no history of other illness, such as asthma or heart disease, nor a history of being allergic to insect bites or bee stings before. "She developed wheezing, dyspnea, and sudden loss of consciousness immediately after a live bee sting," the report stated. "An ambulance was called, although it took 30 minutes to arrive." During her allergic reaction, the woman's blood pressure had dropped to the point of causing "a massive watershed stroke and permanent coma" leading to multiple organ failure. The authors of the medical report stated: "To our knowledge, this is the first reported case of death by bee venom apitherapy due to complications of severe anaphylaxis in a confirmed sensitized patient who was previously tolerant." *washingtonpost.com*, 21 Mar 2018.

A man stabbed his wife to death because she changed the TV channel from an American football game he was watching while he went outside to smoke. Tony Thomas, from the small town of Carlisle in Arkansas, admitted killing his wife Elke last November. *(Queensland) Courier Mail*, 12 Jan 2018.

A boy aged nine killed his 13-year-old sister on 17 March by shooting her in the back of the head in an argument over a video game controller in Mississippi. The girl would not give up the controller when her brother wanted it. *(London) Eve. Standard*, 19 Mar 2018.

Twin sisters died aged 97 after falling close to each other in freezing conditions on 3 March 2017. It appeared that Martha Young Williams fell in the driveway outside Jean Haley's house in Barrington, Rhode Island, and Haley fell as she tried to call for help. A neighbour found them the following morning. Temperatures fell to 11°F (-11.7°C). *D.Telegraph*, 7 Mar 2017.



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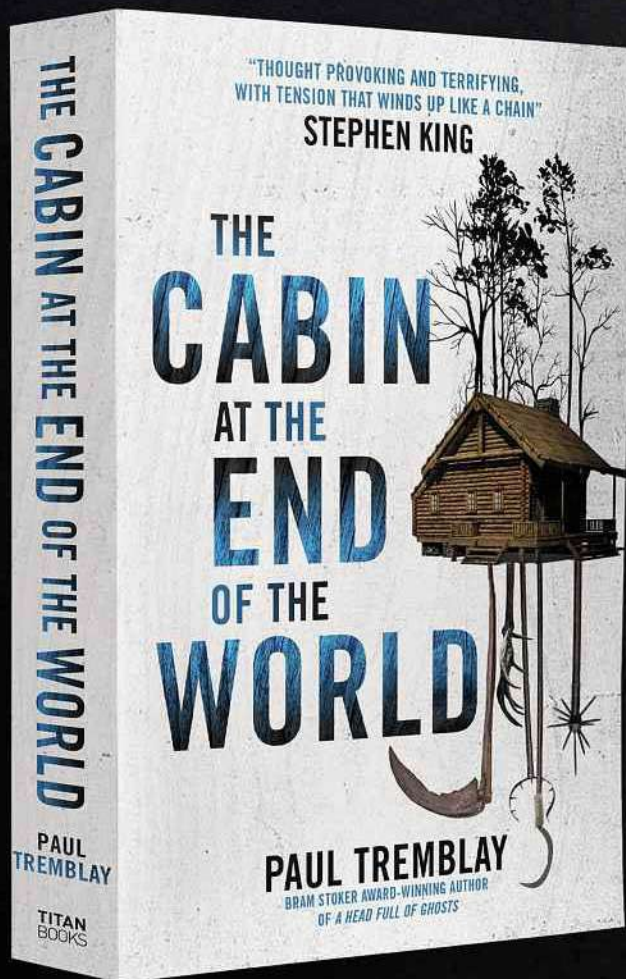
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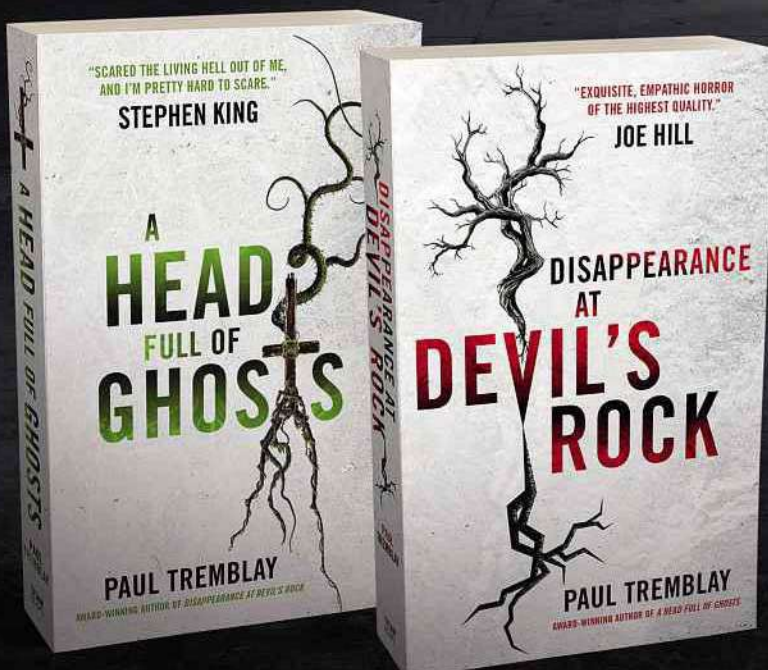
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OUT JUNE!



"EXQUISITE, EMPATHIC HORROR OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY."

**JOE HILL
ON *DISAPPEARANCE AT DEVIL'S ROCK***

"A JOY TO UNPICK, AND ITS FINAL STING IS GUARANTEED TO KEEP YOU UP AT NIGHT."

**SFX
ON *A HEAD FULL OF GHOSTS***